

American Society of Church History

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Source: *Church History*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (Jun., 2004), pp. 272-316

Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of the American Society of Church History

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4146526>

Accessed: 02-03-2017 22:32 UTC

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Female Deacons in the Byzantine Church¹

VALERIE A. KARRAS

Despite the energy devoted by American and Western European church historians and theologians to the question of the ordination of women in early Christianity² and in the (western) medieval Christian Church,³ these scholars have shown comparatively little interest toward the female diaconate in the Byzantine Church,⁴ even when

1. This article is based in part on Valerie A. Karras, "The Liturgical Participation of Women in the Byzantine Church" (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 2002), chapter 6, "Female Deacons in the Byzantine Church," and will be republished, in longer form, in the author's forthcoming book, tentatively titled *Women in the Byzantine Liturgy* (Oxford University Press, expected 2005). The author would like to express deep appreciation to her graduate assistants, Michael Farley, Brett Huebner, Julia Schneider, and Daniel Van Slyke, for their retrieval of books, proofreading, and so on, at various stages of this research; to her dissertation committee, George T. Dennis, S.J., Eustratios Papaioannou, and Dominic Serra, for their patience and suggestions; and to two anonymous reviewers for their *extremely* helpful comments. All errors are, of course, the author's.
2. Relevant works include Ute E. Eisen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity: Epigraphical and Literary Studies*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2000); Susanna Elm, "Vergini, vedove, diaconesse: alcuni osservazioni sullo sviluppo dei cosiddetti 'ordini femminili' nel quarto secolo in oriente," *Codex Aquilarensis* 5 (1991): 77–90; Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, trans. Jean Laporte and Mary Louise Hall (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1976); Giorgio Otranto, "Note sul sacerdozio femminile nell'antichità in margine a una testimonianza di Gelasio I," *Vetera Christianorum* 19 (1982): 341–60; Giorgio Otranto, *Italia meridionale e Puglia paleocristiane: Saggi storici* (Bari: Edipuglia, 1991); and Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of Their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993). As part of a broader examination of early church orders, see the discussion of deaconesses in J. G. Davies, "Deacons, Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14 (1963): 1–15. Early scholarship on the female diaconate, concentrating on the early church, includes Jan Chrysostom Pankowski, *De diaconissis* (Regensburg: George Joseph Manz, 1866); and A. Kalsbach, *Die altkirchliche Einrichtung der Diakonissen bis zu ihrem Erlöschen* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1926).
3. See, for example, Gary Macy, "The Ordination of Women in the Early Middle Ages," *Theological Studies* 61:3 (September 2000): 481–507; and J. Ysebaert, "The Deaconesses in the Western Church of Late Antiquity and their Origin," *Instrumenta Patristica (Eulogia)* 24 (1991): 421–36.
4. The "Byzantine Church" refers to the church of the East Roman (Byzantine) Empire, particularly the Church of Constantinople, in the period from 330 (the founding of Constantinople as the imperial capital of the Roman Empire) to 1453 (the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks).

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Church History 73:2 (June 2004)

comparative analysis could potentially help elucidate questions regarding the theology and practice of women's ordinations in the West.⁵ Most of the research on the female diaconate in the Byzantine Church has occurred in Mediterranean academic circles, usually within the field of Byzantine studies, or in the Eastern Orthodox theological community; sometimes the examination of the female diaconate in the Byzantine Church has been part of a broader examination of women's liturgical ministries.⁶

The evidence for ordained female deacons in the early Christian period, at least in portions of the Eastern Church, is clear and unambiguous.⁷ That deaconesses continued to exist from the early through the middle Byzantine period,⁸ at least in Constantinople and Jerusalem,

5. For example, Macy draws on Eastern Church practice only in a footnote referencing the ordination of deaconesses in the early church, and does not discuss contemporaneous Byzantine practice at all, although it could help explain his observation that "some medievals, including bishops and popes, considered deaconesses and abbesses to be as ordained as any other cleric." Macy, "The Ordination of Women," 502 and 502, n. 93.
6. Works in whole or part on the Byzantine deaconess include Paul F. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of East and West* (New York: Pueblo, 1990); Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald, *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church: Called to Holiness and Ministry* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox, 1998); Aimé Georges Martimort, *Deaconesses: An Historical Study*, trans. K. D. Whitehead (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986); Robert F. Taft, S.J., "Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When—and Why?" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998): 27–87; Evangelos Theodorou, "Ἡ (χειροτονία) ἡ (χειροθεσία) τῶν διακονίσσων," *Theologia* 25:3–4 and 26:1 (July–September and October–December 1954; January–March 1955): 430–601 and 56–76; and Cipriano Vagaggini, "L'ordinazione delle diaconesse nella tradizione greca e bizantina," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 40 (1974): 145–89.
7. Although it does not give ordination rites, the early-third-century *Didascalia Apostolorum*, extant in Syriac from a lost Greek original, parallels the ministry of female deacons to that of male deacons; A. Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, vols. 401 and 407, Syr. 175 and 179 (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1979); Eng, trans. A. Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, vols. 402 and 408, Syr. 176 and 180 (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1979). Book VIII, 3–5, 16–26, of the fourth-century Syriac *Apostolic Constitutions*, which is heavily dependent on the earlier *Didascalia*, gives the ordination rite for bishops, presbyters, deacons, deaconesses, subdeacons, and readers, and the consecration rite for confessors, virgins, widows, and exorcists. *Les Constitutions Apostoliques*, 3 vols., ed., trans., intro., critical text, notes Marcel Metzger, Sources Chrétiennes (hereafter SC), vols. 320, 329, and 336 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1985–87), 3:138–48, 216–28; Eng, trans. "Apostolic Constitutions," in *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 7, reprint ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 481–83, 491–93. For a discussion of these and other early church documents relating to the female diaconate in the East, see Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites*, 83–92; Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 35–119.
8. The "early Byzantine period" denotes the fourth through sixth centuries. The turbulent seventh and eighth centuries, as the early part of the "middle Byzantine period," constitute a liminal phase marking the final transformation of society, state, and culture from late antique to what is characteristically considered "Byzantine." The "middle Byzantine period" thus extends from this transitional time through the ninth

is also indisputable. (This is not to say that deaconesses were to be found throughout the Empire; there clearly were certain localities where deaconesses did not exist.⁹)

While the literary record does not give a detailed and comprehensive picture of the female diaconate, especially with respect to liturgical activities, the order appears to have thrived in the early Byzantine period.¹⁰ From the late fourth to the late seventh century, we have ample literary evidence of a female diaconate in the capital city, and archeological evidence of deaconesses in a number of other areas of the Empire, particularly Asia Minor.¹¹ During his tenure as archbishop of Constantinople, for instance, John Chrysostom counted as one of his closest friends and supporters the wealthy and influential deaconess Olympias.¹² Ecumenical councils set a minimum age for

century (post-iconoclasm) to the fall of Constantinople to the Latins in 1204; the late period then dates from the Latin occupation until the Ottoman conquest in 1453.

9. See, for example, Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 132, regarding the area west of the Jordan in the early to mid-sixth century. Also, most scholars have assumed that ordained female deacons did not exist in Egypt, based on the scanty literary evidence and on comments by Origen and Clement of Alexandria indicating a nonliturgical office; see Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 76–100; Otranto, “Note sul sacerdozio femminile,” 343; Ysebaert, “Deaconesses,” 424. Ugo Zanetti, “Y eut-il des deaconesses en Égypte?” *Vetere Christianorum* 27 (1990): 369–73, shows through textual analysis that women deacons are specifically mentioned in the *euchologion* of the White Monastery in the tenth century, but nothing is known of their rank or functions, nor whether they were ordained.
10. There are numerous women titled “deacon” in late antique correspondence, saints’ lives, and *apophthegmata* (“sayings” or short stories). For brief descriptions of some of these women, see Gillian Cloke, “This Female Man of God”: *Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, AD 350–450* (London: Routledge, 1995), 208–9; Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers: Sayings, Lives, and Stories of Early Christian Women* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 2001), 109–26.
11. While references to deaconesses (the Greek word is *διάκονος* with the feminine article, the significance of which will be discussed below) are scattered throughout the Greek-speaking Mediterranean, the most numerous epigraphic references to female deacons are Asia Minor inscriptions dating to the fourth through sixth centuries; see Eisen, *Women Officeholders*, 162–74.
12. Olympias previously had been a protégé of Gregory of Nazianzus as well. See Elizabeth A. Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1979), 107–57; Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 178–81. Elm (*ibid.*, 174, 181–82) suggests that the ordained female diaconate developed, at least in part, as a method of simultaneously satisfying wealthy and powerful widows and controlling them as ordained clergy in a way that was not possible with the consecrated but nonordained order of Widows. Her theory is plausible, in that the already existing office of deaconess—for which there is some evidence by the end of the first or early in the second century—came to be used as a method of rewarding and honoring (and simultaneously controlling) these wealthy, powerful, and influential aristocratic women. Certainly, early imperial legislation of the female diaconate shows its roots in the order of Widows: Theodosius in June 390 promulgated a law requiring that deaconesses be widows of at least age sixty (the minimum age stipulated by the Apostle Paul for enrolled Widows) and with children to whom they would leave most of their property. *Codex Theodosiani*, Lib. 16, t. 2, no. 27; in *Theodosiani Libri XVI*, eds. T. Mommsen and P. Meyer (Berlin: Weidmann, 1905), 843–44. See, too,

deaconesses,¹³ and Justinian's legislation regarding clergy at the great imperial churches of Hagia Sophia and Blachernae in the mid-sixth century included female deacons, for whom he also promulgated strict laws enforcing chastity.¹⁴ There was even a neighborhood of Constantinople, attested to from the eighth through at least the eleventh century, known as that "of the Deaconess"—presumably it was named after a deaconess of the seventh or eighth century, perhaps the sister of the seventh-century patriarch Sergius.¹⁵ The Barberini codex, containing a liturgical manual (*euchologion*) from the liminal period of the eighth century, provides an ordination rite for female deacons that is more analogous to that of male deacons than are the less detailed, late antique Eastern Church orders of several centuries earlier; in fact, the ordination rite for female deacons in the Barberini codex is virtually identical to the male deacons' rite.¹⁶

The female diaconate continued to exist—at least within the capital city and in some women's monastic communities¹⁷—throughout the

Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica* 7, 16, 11, in Sozomenus, *Kirchengeschichte*, ed. Joseph Bidez with Günther Christian Hansen. Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der Ersten Jahrhunderte, Neue Folge (Berlin: Akademie, 1995), 4:324 (hereafter GCS).

13. For example, can. 15 of the Council of Chalcedon, held in 451, set the minimum age at forty, twenty years younger than the emperor Theodosius had required sixty years earlier; Ioannes Baptista Pitra, *Iuris ecclesiastici Graecorum historia et monumenta iussu Pii ix. Pont. Max. Vol. 1: A primo ad VI saeculum* (Rome: S. Congregationis de Propagande Fide, 1864; reprint, Bardi Editore, 1963), 528; Carl J. Hefele, *Conciliengeschichte*, (Freiburg: Herder, 1875), 2:519. Can. 14 of the Council in Trullo (691–92) reiterated the same age requirement; Ioannes Baptista Pitra, *Iuris ecclesiastici Graecorum historia et monumenta iussu Pii ix. Pont. Max. Vol. 2: A VI ad IX saeculum* (Rome: S. Congregationis de Propagande Fide, 1868; reprint, Bardi Editore, 1963), 31–32. See Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 107–9. Imperial legislation also set minimum ages and otherwise regulated clergy, including deaconesses. In the sixth century, Justinian lowered Theodosius' minimum age for female deacons from sixty to forty (Nov. 123, chap. 13); this was reiterated in book 3, title 1, chap. 5 of the ninth-century *Basilics* (an abridged and somewhat updated version of the Justinianic legal corpus, compiled under the emperors Basil I and Leo VI). *Basilicorum libri LX. Series A*, 8 vols., eds. H. J. Scheltema and N. van der Wal (Groningen: Wolters, 1955–88).
14. See the discussion in Section IV, below, esp. nn. 109, 112, and 113.
15. The neighborhood was called "τὰ τῆς Διακονίσσης." See R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine: Développement urbain et répertoire topographique*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Institut Français d'Études Byzantines, 1964), 341.
16. Barberini gr. 336 preserves the oldest extant Byzantine *euchologion*: *L'eucologio Barberini gr. 336* (Ff. 1–263), eds. Stefano Parenti and Elena Velkovska, *Bibliotheca "ephemerides Liturgicae" "subsidia,"* vol. 80 (Rome: C.L.V.—Edizioni Liturgiche, 1995). The ordination of the female deacon (secs. 163–34, in *Barberini*, 185–88) will be thoroughly examined in Section V, below.
17. According to Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 151–52, two manuscripts of liturgical service books (*euchologia*)—the Grottaferrata codex from the eleventh or twelfth century and the Cairo codex from the fourteenth century—specify that the deaconess, "according to the custom that prevails today, . . . must be a nun in habit, tonsured," thereby implying that the rubrics writer was aware that nonmonastic women had formerly been ordained as deaconesses, but this was no longer the practice. Martimort cites as his

middle Byzantine period, with both liturgical and pastoral functions, although female deacons may not have continued to be ordained as late as the twelfth century, and their duties varied somewhat from those the order had in the early church.¹⁸ Evidence of their continuing liturgical and pastoral roles is provided, respectively, by Constantine Porphyrogenitus' tenth-century manual of ceremonies, which refers to a special area for deaconesses in the Constantinopolitan cathedral of Hagia Sophia (the "Great Church"),¹⁹ and by Anna Comnena's biographical panegyric to her father, the emperor Alexios I Comnenos, who ruled from 1081 to 1118: the princess mentions the emperor's concern to ensure that "the work of the deaconesses was carefully organized" in the church of St. Paul, attached to the large charitable complex Alexios had constructed in the capital city.²⁰ Two near-contemporaneous canonists of the twelfth century, John Zonaras and Alexios Aristenos, in their commentaries on canon 15 of Chalcedon,²¹ also discuss deaconesses as though still active. Their witness is confirmed, at least in the Great Church, at the turn of the thirteenth century by the eyewitness account of Anthony of Novgorod,²² and a century later by an unpublished *entolma* (order) of Patriarch Athanasius I (1303–9) calling for the abolition of the "custom" of deaconesses.²³ The question of how long female deacons survived as an *ordained* order is murkier, however, and will be discussed in

source A. Dimitrievskij, *Opisanie liturgitseskich rukopisej*, vol. 2, Εύχολόγια (Kiev: Izd. Imperatorskago Universiteta Sv. Vladimira, 1901), 346, 996. Curiously, this instruction is missing from the ordination rite, taken from the Grottaferrata manuscript, which is reproduced in Jacobus Goar, ed., *Euchologion sive rituale Graecorum* (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1730; reprint 1960), 218–19. Goar's *euchologion* draws on a number of Greek manuscripts, but relies principally on the Grottaferrata codex.

18. With respect to functions and duties, see the discussion in Section II, below, for instance, regarding the universality of infant baptism.
19. According to Constantine, *De ceremoniis* 44 (35), for the feast of the Annunciation, the emperor, after visiting the *skeuophylakion* (where relics and vessels were kept, and the Gifts prepared), "passes through the narthex of the gynaeceum where the deaconesses of the Great Church have their customary place." Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos, *Le livre des cérémonies*, ed. and trans. Albert Vogt (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1935), 171; Eng. trans. Taft, "Women at Church," 65.
20. Anna Comnena, *Alexiad* 15, 7–8, in vol. 3 of Anna Comnena, *Alexiade (règne de l'empereur Alexis I Comnène, 1081–1118)*, trans. Bernard Leib (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, various), 217. These deaconesses may also have been the female chanters that Alexios ordered for the antiphonal chants in St. Paul's.
21. J.-P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeca* (hereafter PG) (Paris: Migne, 1857–66), 137:141–44. See the conclusion to this article for a discussion of their commentaries.
22. Anthony's description also confirms Constantine Porphyrogenitus' siting (n. 19, above) of a special location for deaconesses in Hagia Sophia. See nn. 49 and 50, below.
23. In codex Vat. gr. 2219, f. 132v–143r; see No. 1747, item 1, in V. Laurent, *Les registres des actes du patriarcat de Constantinople*, vol. I, *Les actes des patriarches*, fasc. IV, *Les registres de 1208 à 1309* (Paris: Institut Français d'Études Byzantines, 1971), 526: "Ils proscriront les

Section VI of this article; the extant evidence provides a *terminus ante quem* of the early twelfth century.²⁴

The next several sections of this article will show that both civil and ecclesiastical legislation, and liturgical theology as manifested in the ordination rite, demonstrate unquestionably that the female diaconate in the Byzantine Church during the early and middle Byzantine periods was recognized not only as part of the clergy, but as one of the "major orders" of clergy, as that term would later be used to denote the threefold ordained orders of the episcopacy, the priesthood, and the diaconate.

I. THE MINISTRY OF BYZANTINE DEACONESSSES

The activities of Byzantine deaconesses varied over time. Anna Comnena's mention of deaconesses attached to the church serving her father's large philanthropic center implies that charitable and other pastoral activities remained an ongoing concern of at least some female deacons. However, the primary reason for ordination to the clergy is specific liturgical function, and that is the area for which we have the most information with respect to female deacons, especially in late antiquity. One of the most important sacramental duties of the deaconess in the early church in the East was conducting the physical anointing²⁵ and baptism of (nude) adult women, who were then "officially" baptized by the bishop's prayer over the just-baptized woman after she was either chastely robed or hidden from male gaze.²⁶ This function of deaconesses was made obsolete by the increasing rarity of adult baptism from the end of the fourth century on due to the combination of the dominance of Christianity as the state religion and the universal adoption of infant baptism.²⁷

monastères doubles et feront cesser la coutume des diaconesses." The author is grateful to an anonymous reviewer for citing this *entagma*.

24. See n. 53, below.

25. For example, John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 2, 24, describes this part of the rite as performed (for men) in Antioch in the late fourth century. Jean Chrysostome, *Huit catéchèses baptismales inédites*, intro., critical ed., trans., and notes Antoine Wenger, Sources Chrétiennes 50 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1957), 147.

26. *Apostolic Constitutions*, III, 16, in Metzger, *Les Constitutions Apostoliques II*, 154–58; Francis X. Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1905), 201; cf. Vööbus, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 53. The fifth-century *Testamentum Domini*, II, 8, prescribes a similar role for ordained Widows and also instructs that women being baptized be shielded from the presbyter or bishop's view by a veil. I. Rahmani, ed., *Testamentum Domini Nostri Jesu Christi* (Mainz: Kirchheim, 1899; reprint, Hildesheim: George Olms, 1968), 128–31.

27. José Grosdidier de Matons, "La femme dans l'empire byzantin," in *Histoire mondiale de la femme*, ed. Pierre Grimal (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie de France, 1967), 40, connects the decline of deaconesses to this lessening need for them in adult baptisms.

The conversion to Christianity of foreign women still provided occasion for female

However, while the baptismal need for female deacons decreased as the church moved into the early Byzantine period, other liturgical and pastoral duties remained, particularly with respect to women who were housebound due to illness or childbirth. The early church's practice of sending a deaconess with the Eucharist to the homes of housebound female parishioners,²⁸ although not specifically mentioned in texts dating from the middle Byzantine period, probably remained one of their functions well into this period. This is indicated by a letter of Photios written between 877 and 886 to Leo, bishop of Calabria in southern Italy. Leo had consulted the Constantinopolitan patriarch about certain canonical matters; among them was a question about women who took Communion to Christians who had been imprisoned (perhaps held hostage?) by "Saracens," that is, Arabs. In his reply, Photios instructed Leo to choose noble women, either virgins or in chaste old age,²⁹ who were "worthy of being received into the diaconate and of being received into the rank of deacons."³⁰ Since Leo asked the question of Photios, evidently the order of female deacons was not known in his area of Calabria by this time, or at least so few deaconesses still existed that the Calabrian bishop was unfamiliar with the guidelines for and restrictions on candidates to the order.³¹ Photios' response, on the other hand, indicates (1) that female deacons still existed (otherwise, his remarks about choosing women "worthy of being received into the diaconate" would make no sense), and (2) that he knew not only about the type of women who were ordained to the diaconate, but also that their ministry included taking the Eucharist to shut-ins.

deacons to assist in baptism, but, at least in rural Byzantine Palestine, that practice had fallen into disuse, although female deacons still existed in the Church of Jerusalem. See John Moschos, *Pratum spirituale*, chap. 3, in PG 87.3:2853–56.

28. For example, *Didascalia Apostolorum* 16: "For there are houses where you may not send deacons, on account of the pagans, but to which you may send deaconesses. And also because the service of a deaconess is required in many other domains." In Vööbus, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 156.
29. Unlike the canons and civil legislation regulating female deacons, Photios does not specify virgins and widows, but perhaps that is implied by the phrase "σεμνῶ γῆρα."
30. Ep. 297, 4; in Photios, *Photii patriarchae Constantinopolitani epistulae et amphilochia*, eds. B. Laourdas and L. G. Westerink, vol. 3, *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana* (Leipzig: BSB B. G. Teubner, 1983), 166.
31. Calabria was part of Byzantine Italy and so generally had more in common with Constantinople than with Rome. In fact, there is evidence of women deacons in Byzantine Italy in the seventh and eighth centuries (see nn. 36, 42, and 47, below), though not in the ninth. It is unclear, moreover, if they still existed, whether they existed as their own order by this time in the Latin Church (that is, further north in Italy). Western deaconesses' ministry may have been connected to that of their husbands; that is, they generally were the wives of deacons, and as such were also ordained and shared an active ministry with their husbands. See Gary Macy, "Ordination of Women," 493–94.

In addition to the needs of laywomen (and imprisoned laymen), the seclusion of nuns precipitated special needs within the female monastic community. Thus, as noted above, deaconesses became particularly associated with female monasticism, from the fourth-century deaconess Lampadion³² in charge of a choir of virgins in the monastic community founded by the "Fourth Cappadocian,"³³ Macrina, to St. Irene in the ninth century,³⁴ a nun attached to the convent of Chrysobalanton in Constantinople who, according to her tenth-century hagiographer, was ordained as a deacon of the Great Church, that is, Hagia Sophia:

Without delay the patriarch rose from his throne at once and asked for a censer. Burning incense and praising God he initiated a hymn befitting the occasion. Then he first ordained Irene deaconess of the

32. Gregory of Nyssa, *De vita Macrinae* 29, in Grégoire de Nysse: *Vie de Sainte Macrine*, intro., critical text, trans., notes Pierre Maraval, Sources Chrétiennes (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1971), 178:236; Eng. trans. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Saint Macrina*, ed. and trans. Kevin Corrigan (Toronto: Peregrina, 1997), 45. Corrigan notes (68, n. 78) that the Greek term χορός may have either a general meaning (a group), or the specific meaning of a choir, as may be inferred from Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition*, 25, in Hippolytus, *On the Apostolic Tradition*, trans. John Behr (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 134, or 26 in Hippolytus, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr*, 1968, trans. Gregory Dix, ed. Henry Chadwick, reprint with corrections from 2nd rev. ed. (London: Alban, 1991), vv. 18–32. See Johannes Quasten, *Music and Worship in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Pastoral Musicians, 1983), 78–81. Elm, *Virgins of God*, 177–78, n. 122, discussing the scholarly debate over the general or technical interpretation of the word in this context, observes that χορός is twice mentioned in the *vita* in a ceremonial sense, and cautiously raises Quasten's suggestion that it was in fact a musical chorus, while noting that Nyssa more commonly uses the word in its generic sense in the *vita*.
33. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), 89.
34. While the *vita* of St. Irene purports to tell the life of a ninth-century saint, the English translator of the *Life* finds the lack of chronological coherence so striking as not only to suggest that the text was composed in the tenth century (which the hagiographer readily admits), but also to call into question the very existence of the female saint. Jan O. Rosenqvist, *The Life of St Irene Abbess of Chrysobalanton* (Stockholm: Uppsala University, 1986), xxiii–xxix. While the latter conclusion is unwarranted given the Byzantine author's reference to the continuing veneration of Irene's tomb in his or her own day, Rosenqvist is no doubt correct in his theory that the description of Irene's life is a work of hagiographical fiction. However, that need not negate the value of the *vita*'s description of Irene's ordination at the hands of the patriarch. It would have made little sense for the hagiographer to include a description of her diaconal ordination if the practice were completely unfamiliar to the average Byzantine layperson. Since ordination as a deacon was not a standard trope in middle Byzantine *vitae* of female saints, its inclusion in *The Life of St. Irene* points to either current or relatively recent actual practice and may in fact be one of the few elements of the saint's life based in fact.

Great Church—for through the Spirit in him he knew her purity —, and thereafter consecrated her with the seal of hegumenate.³⁵

Three things are notable in the above account: (1) the (masculine) second declension noun *diakonos* (διάκονος) was still being used, rather than the feminized *diakonissa* (διακόνισσα); (2) the word *cheirotomia* (χειροτονία) was used, a technical term for ordination; and (3) Irene was simultaneously consecrated as *hegoumene*, or abbess, of her monastery. The use of the title *diakonos* is significant since the alternative title, *diakonissa*, could also refer to the wife of a deacon.³⁶ Both the saint's personal background—Irene was a nun with no former husband—and the term *diakonos* make it patent that the patriarch was indeed ordaining Irene to a clerical order. Her ordained status is further reinforced both by the use of the term *cheirotomia* for “ordination” (the significance of which will be discussed in Section V) and by the patriarch's beginning the Divine Liturgy, the liturgical context for ordinations to major orders.³⁷

35. Rosenqvist, *Life of St Irene*, 26–29.

36. J. G. Davies, “Deacons, Deaconesses,” 1, n. 1, states that the term διακόνισσα first appears in synodal literature in canon 19 of the Council of Nicaea, and the purely feminine term was sometimes used interchangeably with διάκονος (for example, in the fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions* and in some of Justinian's sixth-century legislation). Archbishop Peter L'Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils: The Disciplinary Work of the First Four Ecumenical Councils* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 244, observes that Justinian used the term διακόνισσα in legislation dealing with deaconesses alone; in legislation referring to both male and female deacons, however, he used the term διάκονος with the adjective(s) for the appropriate sex. Nevertheless, ἡ διάκονος is the more common term used for a female deacon (leading to potential ambiguity with respect to the masculine plural form). Both canonical and civil legislation in late antiquity and the early Byzantine period more regularly use the term διάκονος for a woman deacon, as do the overwhelming majority of epigrams for women deacons compiled by Eisen, *Women Officeholders*, chap. 7. Surprisingly, the use of this term for female as well as male deacons has not been readily recognized by some scholars, leading to unfortunate “corrections.” For example, Gustave Schlumberger, in his *Sigillographie de l'empire byzantin* (Paris: Societé de l'Orient Latin, 1884; reprint, Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1963), 232, incorrectly notes “sic” and emends to “Antonin” (that is, Antoninos, a male name) the feminine genitive name Ἀντονίνης, which appears on the obverse of a seventh- or eighth-century seal from Byzantine Italy whose reverse shows the masculine/feminine genitive title διακόνου. In the CD-ROM *Prosopography of the Byzantine Empire I* (641–867), ed. John Robert Martindale (London: King's College/Ashgate, 2001), Martindale does note that “it is possible that the feminine form ‘Antonina’ is correct and that the owner of the seal was a deaconess,” yet the entry is listed as “Antoninos I,” a male deacon, when in fact there is no legitimate reason to doubt that the owner of the seal was exactly what the seal indicates: a female deacon named Antonina.

37. The Greek phrase “τὸν θεὸν εὐλογήσας,” which Rosenqvist translates merely as the bishop's “praising God,” should be recognized as more likely referring to his beginning the divine liturgy: “Εὐλογημένη ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Πατρὸς,” that is, “Blessed is the kingdom of the Father,” Goar, *Euchologion*, 52. (Alternatively, it could refer to the beginning blessing of several other services, “Εὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν,” that is,

As for the conjunction of the diaconate with Irene's consecration as abbess, this coincides with one of the two types of monastic women who typically were ordained to the diaconate in the early and middle Byzantine period:³⁸ (1) abbesses and nuns with liturgical functions, and (2) the wives of men who were being raised to the episcopacy.³⁹ By the fourth and fifth centuries, it was increasingly expected that men elevated as bishops would become celibate, even if married;⁴⁰ in the middle of the sixth century, the first civil legislation requiring this appeared, promulgated by Justinian in 531.⁴¹ The first ecclesiastical legislation requiring bishops to separate from their wives was enacted over a century later. Canon 48 of the Council in Trullo, held in 691–92, calls for the wife of a bishop to take monastic vows after her husband's consecration as bishop and, if deemed worthy, to be ordained a deacon.⁴² Perhaps the diaconate was expected since, as Choliĵ demonstrates with Theodore Balsamon⁴³ and others in the late middle Byzantine period, church officials believed "that the wife is, in some way, consecrated because of her union in marriage with her

"Blessed is our God.") The author thanks Eustratios Papaioannou for calling attention to this. Also, the order given, ordination first, followed by consecration as abbess, fits this interpretation since, although ordination to major orders occurred during the divine liturgy, ordination to lower orders, monastic tonsuring, and consecration to monastic offices were done outside of—hence, often after—the liturgy.

38. That the *entolma* of Patriarch Athanasius I, mentioned above (see n. 23), proscribed both double monasteries (that is, men's and women's joint communities) and deaconesses in the same item likely indicates that these deaconesses were nuns.
39. While most of the documentation for this latter category dates to the early and early middle Byzantine periods, one possible late antique example of this second category is Theosebia, who *may* have been a deaconess, and who was either the wife or sister of Gregory of Nyssa, based on a condolence letter he received from Gregory of Nazianzus. See Elm, *Virgins of God*, 157–58, for a discussion of the relative merits of the evidence; also, Michel René Barnes, "'The Burden of Marriage' and Other Notes on Gregory of Nyssa's *On Virginity*," *Studia Patristica*, v. 37, part II, eds. M. F. Wiles and E. J. Yarnold (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 13, esp. n. 7.
40. C. Knetes, "Ordination and Matrimony in the Eastern Orthodox Church," *Journal of Theological Studies* 11 (1910): 481–90. Knetes attributes the development of the widespread expectation of episcopal celibacy to monastic influence.
41. *Code of Justinian I*, 3, 47 (48); in *Corpus iuris civilis* (hereafter CIC), 3 vols. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1954–59), vol. 2, *Codex Iustinianus*, ed. Paul Krueger, 34. Justinian's legislation on bishops and their wives and families is discussed in Knetes, "Ordination and Matrimony," 490–91. For more on the history of marriage within the ordained orders of clergy, see Roman Choliĵ, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West* (Leominster, U.K.: Fowler Wright Books, 1989).
42. Pitra, *Iuris ecclesiastici*, 2:50. An example from eighth-century Byzantine Italy is recounted in Agnellus, *Liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis* 154, in *Le Liber pontificalis*, 3 vols., text, intro., and commentary L. Duchesne (Paris: E. Thorin; E. de Boccard, 1955–57), 1:483; cited in Martindale, *Prosopography*, "Euphemia 3" and "Sergios 54."
43. Balsamon, a canonist, was patriarch-in-exile of Antioch, residing in Constantinople in the late twelfth century.

husband-priest."⁴⁴ By the middle Byzantine period, bishops typically took monastic vows, so the monastic tonsure combined with ordination to the female diaconate was as near as the wife of a bishop could get to her (former) husband's ecclesiastical "rank."⁴⁵ There is no indication, however, that bishops' wives-cum-deaconesses were expected to have any particular liturgical or other ministry. Presumably they served the same functions as other deaconesses within a monastic setting.

These ministries of monastic female deacons were typically either liturgical or supervisory in nature. The simultaneous ordination and consecration of St. Irene of Chrysabalanton as both deacon and abbess reflects the continuation of a tradition evident from the early Byzantine period of combining these two offices; for example, Olympias and her successor, Elisanthia, were both abbess and deaconess.⁴⁶ This association of deaconess with abbess thus began by at least the late fourth century or early fifth century in the East, and occurred in the medieval period in the Latin as well as the Byzantine Church.⁴⁷

44. Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy*, 28. This became the rationale for forbidding the widows of priests to remarry. Gary Macy's article, "Ordination of Women," esp. 490–94, demonstrates how a similar attitude was manifested differently in the medieval Latin Church, by ordaining or consecrating the spouses of clerics.

45. Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy*, 28–29, cites similar reasoning in a requirement of Pope Alexander III preserved in the *Decretals* of Gregory IX, which disallowed a married man from entering a monastery unless his wife also took monastic vows. Regarding the wife's assumption of a rank similar to her husband's, Macy, "Ordination of Women," 493–94, suggests that the wives of presbyters and deacons in the Western Church perhaps had "at times formed a liturgical team with their spouse." He notes that, "according to a Roman Ordinal from ca. 900, *presbyterae* and deaconesses received their commissioning at the same time and as part of the same ceremony as the priests and deacons who were their spouses. The prayers for the ordination of deaconesses in the several sacramentaries through the twelfth century are identical (apart from the use of the feminine form) to those used in the ordination of a deacon. Both deaconesses and *presbyterae* received special vestments as part of their ordination rites. These rites apparently did not distinguish between those deaconesses (or *presbyterae*) who had an active ministry and those who were merely the spouses of priests and deacons." A Latin rite of ordination for the female deacon is published in Cyrille Vogel and Reinhard Elze, *Le Pontifical Romano-Germanique du dixième siècle. Le Texte I. Studi e Testi* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1963), 226:54–59.

46. See Elm, *Virgins of God*, 180, who claims that "by the fifth century the *hegoumene*-deaconess nexus was common."

47. For example, Radegund of Poitiers; see Pauline Schmitt Pantel, ed., and Arthur Goldhammer, trans., "From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints," in *A History of Women in the West* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 1:437–38; Macy, "Ordination of Women," 492–93. Another example, from mid-eighth-century Byzantine Italy, is Euphrosyne, deaconess and abbess of the women's monastery of SS. Marcellinus and Petrus in Naples; Bartolommeo Capasso, *Monumenta ad Neapolitani ducatus historiam pertinentia* (Naples: F. Giannini, 1881), 1:262–63; cited in Martindale, *Prosopography*, "Euphrosyne 5." The *vita* of Neilos of Rossano, chap. 79, provides a tenth-century example of an abbess-deacon in Byzantine Italy (Capua); *Βίος καὶ πολιτεία τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Νείλου τοῦ Νέου*, ed. G. Giovanelli (Grottaferrata:

As for public liturgical functions, the one most commonly mentioned is that of chanting. The *vita* of St. Macrina shows that Lampadia was responsible for the women's choir, a liturgical duty, which would make ordination to the diaconate appropriate. By the late middle Byzantine period, the liturgical function of chanting appears to have become one of the ministries of female deacons not only in women's monasteries but also in the Great Church. Several *typika* (liturgical or monastic rules) and *euchologia* (liturgical manuals or service books) mention women's choirs, which chanted the first part of matins.⁴⁸ The eyewitness account of Anthony of Novgorod, during his visit to Constantinople in about the year 1200, confirms this as contemporary practice. His testimony is particularly compelling since, unlike the ritual manuals, which characteristically attempt to preserve a record of even outdated rites and practices, Anthony's primary concern was simply to describe his experience. He observed a group of women, whom he mistakenly called "myrrhbearers,"⁴⁹ participating in the matins service at Hagia Sophia. Matter-of-factly and in passing, Anthony revealed that these women chanted during the matins: "And not far from this prothesis the Myrrhbearers sing."⁵⁰ These "myrrhbearers" probably were deaconesses since he located them in exactly the same spot as Constantine Porphyrogenitus had located the

Badia di Grottaferrata, 1972), 118. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for bringing the latter source to my attention.

48. Juan Mateos, *Le Typicon de la Grande Église. Ms. Sainte-Croix No 40, Xe siècle, vols. I-II*, trans. Juan Mateos, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, vols. 165–66 (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1962–63), 1:4–5, 154, and 2:52 and 287; Miguel Arranz, "L'office de l'asmatikos hesperinos ('vêpres chantés') de l'ancien euchologe byzantin," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 44 (1978): 408.
49. The author is indebted to George Majeska, who noted that some Russian travelers to Constantinople, such as Anthony of Novgorod, mentioned "myrrhbearing women" who sang and who had a special place near the Great Church's "prothesis chapel," or *skeuophylakion*, which was located just outside the north door in the northeast bay, that is, the same place mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogenitus as the "deaconesses' narthex" (see n. 19). For this reason, despite Anthony's identification of these women as myrrhbearers, Majeska believes that the reference is to the deaconesses of the Great Church. He theorizes that the confusion of titles was due to the Russians' not having deaconesses; the title "myrrhbearer," however, was frequently used for women serving a wide variety of nonordained functions in the Russian Church. The Russian use of the term "myrrhbearer" should not, however, be confused with the consecrated or ordained order of myrrhbearers in the Church of Jerusalem, which participated with the rest of the clergy in the Paschal services at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. See nn. 57 and 59, below.
50. A.III.8; in *Kniga Palomnika: Skazanie mest svjatykh vo Tsaregrade Antonija Arkhiepiskopa Novgorodskago v 1200 godu*, ed. Kh. M. Loparev, *Pravoslavnij Palestinskij Sbornik* (St. Petersburg: Izd. Imp. Pravoslavnago palestinskago ob va, 1899), 51:2–9; trans. Taft, "Women at Church," 67. Taft identifies the prothesis with the cylindrical *skeuophylakion* of the Great Church, just outside the walls of the church on the northeast side.

deaconesses over two hundred years earlier.⁵¹ These women, also called *askētriai* (so named after their communal ascetic lifestyle), in addition to Balsamon's description of their maintaining order in the women's aisle, sang during matins and for funerals, for which they also sometimes served as mourners.⁵² It is likely that these are the women to whom Balsamon dismissively referred when he commented: "[t]oday deaconesses are no longer ordained although certain members of ascetical religious communities are erroneously styled deaconesses."⁵³

In addition to the Great Church, this liturgical ministry of chanting was mirrored in other important churches, if not by deaconesses, then by monastic women following the same liturgical pattern. For example, a twelfth-century satirical account of a pilgrimage to Thessaloniki for the feast of its patron, St. Demetrios, describes the liturgical participation of nuns during the basilica's festal service as follows:

Then from those who had specially practiced the rituals of the festival—what a congregation they had there—there was heard a most divine psalmody, most gracefully varied in its rhythm, order, and artistic alternations. For it was not only men who were singing; *the holy nuns in the left wing of the church, divided into two antiphonal choirs*, also offered up the Holy of Holies to the martyr.⁵⁴

Commenting on this description, Sharon Gerstel notes that the wing where the nuns were located "must refer to the widened eastern end of the north aisle adjacent to the sanctuary."⁵⁵ In other words, the nuns in St. Demetrios in Thessaloniki were stationed in the area corresponding to the *gynaeceum* of the deaconesses in Hagia Sophia; moreover, like the deaconesses, they chanted from there during services.

It appears, then, that certain leadership positions within the monastery—at a minimum, those of abbess and of director of the liturgical choir—were associated with the female diaconate, recognition of the

51. See above, n. 19; Taft, "Women at Church," 65–70.

52. R. Janin, *Les églises et les monastères, La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin* (Paris: Institut Français d'Études Byzantines, 1975), 3:549–50; Gilbert Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire: Études sur le recueil des patria*, Bibliothèque Byzantine Études (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984), 8:252, n. 177. Earlier, until at least the ninth century, ordained female deacons were distinct from the *askētriai* (ἀσκήτριάι); see the citation from the *Basilics* in n. 115, below. Perhaps some of the ἀσκήτριάι were deaconesses.

53. Theodore Balsamon, *Scholia in Concilium Chalcedonense*, in PG 137:441; Eng. trans. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 171.

54. R. Romano, ed., *Timarione: Testo critico, introduzione, traduzione, commentario e lessico* (Naples, 1974), 59. Eng. trans. *Timarion*, trans. B. Baldwin (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 48–49; quoted in Gerstel, "Painted Sources," 92–93 (emphasis in Gerstel).

55. Gerstel, "Painted Sources," 93, n. 18.

supervisory or liturgical functions of these women. In addition, at least some deaconesses—and, later, nuns who served as their successors—attached to urban foundations served the broader community liturgically by chanting during the services in the great cathedrals.

Other specific activities of deaconesses during worship, whether in monasteries or in cathedrals and parish churches, are for the most part unknown, with one exception. A liturgical manual from the Church of Jerusalem⁵⁶ dating to the tenth century includes in its paschal rubrics two orders of ordained or consecrated women: female deacons and *myrophoroi* (myrrhbearers).⁵⁷ According to the rubrics, near the end of the paschal matins there was a procession to the *solea*,⁵⁸ which included two of various orders of clergy: deacons, subdeacons, *myrophoroi*, and deaconesses. While the *myrophoroi* followed behind the deacons, holding three-legged reading stands (*triskellia*), the deaconesses carried two *manoualia* (single candleholders) with lit candles.⁵⁹

In general, however, female deacons did not have the public processional and other liturgical functions of male deacons. For example, the ordination rite, to be discussed in Section V, below, does not provide for the deaconess to read petitions and explicitly prohibits her

56. The Church of Jerusalem, although a patriarchate in its own right and politically subject to Arab Muslim rule from the seventh century, nevertheless maintained spiritual ties to the Byzantine Church and continued to be a Greek Byzantine Church. Because of pilgrimage traffic, the rites and calendar of the Church of Jerusalem, particularly in the early Byzantine period, were extensive and elaborate, and “exerted a strong liturgical influence on the other churches of the East.” Hans-Joachim Schulz, *The Byzantine Liturgy: Symbolic Structure and Faith Expression*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell, intro. Robert Taft (New York: Pueblo, 1980), 139. The hymnographic tradition of the monastery of St. Sabas in Palestine during the middle Byzantine period was equally influential on the Byzantine Church.

57. The *typikon* (liturgical rule or manual) describing these rites, “Τυπικὸν τῆς ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις Ἐκκλησίας,” is reproduced in A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Ἀναλέκτα ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς σταχυολογίας*, Vol. II (St. Petersburg: V. Kirvaoum, 1894); see especially 179–99. The manuscript dates to 1122, but in the prologue (iii) Papadopoulos-Kerameus argues that it is a copy of an earlier work from the late ninth or early tenth century, based on a prayer commemorating Patriarch Nicholas, whose patriarchate lasted from 932 to 947 (the two Latin patriarchs named Nicholas reigned several decades after the written date of the manuscript, so the commemoration cannot refer to either of them). The *typikon* in general provides the texts and rubrics (some of which may have been added in the twelfth century) for the liturgical services of the Church of Jerusalem. A summary of the material on the *myrophoroi* contained in the Jerusalem *typikon* can be found in Gabriel Bertonière, *The Historical Development of the Easter Vigil and Related Services in the Greek Church*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* (Rome: Pontifical Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1972), 193:50, n. 108. For a fuller discussion, see Karras, “Liturgical Participation,” 153–62.

58. The *solea* is the part of the nave, often set off from the rest of the nave, directly in front of (that is, to the west of) the altar area. By the tenth to twelfth century, this is typically where one would find the chanter’s stand and the bishop’s throne.

59. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Ἀναλέκτα*, 199.

from distributing Communion during the Divine Liturgy, both of which were typical functions of the male deacon. Therefore, although they were ordained at the altar and received Communion there, there was no need for them to remain in the altar throughout the service; in fact, it would not have been practicable—or even possible—for all the large number of clergy attached to the Constantinopolitan cathedral to remain in the sanctuary throughout the liturgy.⁶⁰

Rather, according to several accounts from the middle Byzantine period, the deaconesses of the Great Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople participated in the liturgy not from within the sanctuary, but from an area just outside the sanctuary on the north aisle.⁶¹ This location, adjacent to the northern women's aisle (the *gynaeceum*⁶²) on the ground floor, indicates that their duties included general oversight or management of the *gynaeceum*, just as the *Apostolic Constitutions* prescribed for deaconesses in the early church.⁶³ In fact, in the late middle Byzantine period, at a time when female deacons had presumably devolved to a nonordained monastic order, Balsamon summed up their duties in just this way in a letter to Patriarch Mark III of Alexandria: "they ecclesiastically manage the *gynaeceum*."⁶⁴

By this time, that is, the end of the twelfth century, while deaconesses remained in the same location as earlier, they were no longer ordained and so would no longer have entered the sanctuary to receive the Eucharist. This is probably the foundation for Balsamon's assertion, in his response to Mark of Alexandria, that deaconesses did not participate (or receive Communion) at the altar⁶⁵ and that in

60. See n. 96, below.

61. See n. 19, above; also, Taft, "Women at Church," 65–70.

62. In the Great Church, as in all the large churches in the East, women and men were segregated for cultural and moral reasons; in most churches, women occupied the north side and men the south side (churches were always oriented to the east). See Sharon E. J. Gerstel, "Painted Sources for Female Piety in Medieval Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998): 91–92. Taft, "Women at Church," 57, even notes a funeral rubric in an eleventh-century codex that calls for the body of the deceased to be placed on the right (south) side of the church if male, on the left (north) side if female. However, most of the textual evidence for Hagia Sophia indicates that women occupied both the north and south aisles, with men in the central portion of the nave. See Taft, "Women at Church," 34–39; and T. F. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 130–33.

63. *Apostolic Constitutions* II, 57, 10, in SC, 320:314.

64. "τὴν γυναικωνῆτιν ἐκκλησιαστικῶς διορθοῦμεναι" (translation mine). Theodore Balsamon, *Responsa ad interrogaciones Marci* 35, in PG 138:988. Cf. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 172.

65. "παρὰ δὲ τῇ ἀγιάτῃ Ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θρόνου τῶν Κωνσταντινουπολιτῶν διακόνισσαι προχειρίζονται, μίαν μὲν μετουσίαν μὴ ἔχουσαι ἐν τῷ βήματι"; Balsamon, *Responsa* 35, in PG 138:988.

general they were simply part of the congregation.⁶⁶ Balsamon's description of the liturgical functions of Byzantine deaconesses is overly narrow, though, since he omits to mention their role as chanters, as witnessed by Anthony of Novgorod.

In fact, the location of the deaconesses, adjacent to the sanctuary, was not the most practical place for women whose only duty was to keep order in the women's section of the church. On the other hand, it would have served as an indication of their clerical status. More importantly, in terms of liturgical function, it was a practical location from which to sing (directly opposite to the male readers and chanters) and also from which to approach the altar in order to receive the Eucharist with the other clergy, as the ordination rite prescribed.⁶⁷ This special liturgical space for the deaconesses, then, both remained as an institutional memory of an earlier time when female deacons were ordained and received the Eucharist as clergy, and provided an appropriate location from which to chant for women who continued to be known as deaconesses even when the title had become a monastic honorific rather than an indication of a substantively clerical office.

Given both the number and variety of primary sources attesting to the female diaconate, therefore, there is general agreement as to both the existence of deaconesses in the Byzantine Church and the nature of their various liturgical and pastoral functions. However, there has been considerable disagreement and even controversy, in academic as well as ecclesiastical circles, over such questions as (1) whether the female deacon was considered part of the clergy; (2) if so, whether the deaconess was included among the "major orders" of clergy; and (3) what light the ordination rite of the female deacon might shed on the previous two questions. It is to these issues that we now turn.

II. THE FEMALE DEACON AS CLERGY

The clerical status of the female deacon in the Byzantine Church is clear for the early period. Even a canon from the Council of Nicaea (the first ecumenical council), held in 325, stating that certain deaconesses were not ordained, interpreted in its context implies the clerical, ordained status of female deacons in the catholic Church. This canon 19 regulated the manner in which Paulianist clergy were to be received into the catholic Church, requiring re-baptism and re-ordination,

66. "ἐκκλησιάζουσιν δὲ τὰ πολλὰ"; *ibid.*

67. See Section V, below.

and administering the latter only for those who are found worthy.⁶⁸ Deaconesses were specifically banned from ordination because, the canon states, "since they have received no laying on of hands [*cheirothesian tina*], [they] are thus therefore to be counted among the laity."⁶⁹

The pertinent question here is, which deaconesses "have received no laying on of hands"? Aimé Georges Martimort, rather than considering the question of which deaconesses are the subject of the final sentence of the canon,⁷⁰ focuses instead on a phrase from the previous sentence, which calls for the same form to be observed for deaconesses and all other clergy. Then, rather than applying this clause to the re-baptism and potential re-ordination of Paulianist clergy, which has just been discussed, he instead interprets it as indication that the manner of ordination in the catholic and Paulianist Churches was the same for deaconesses and other clergy, thus reading the canon to mean that *neither* the Paulianists nor the catholic Church ordained women as deacons: "No more than before, however, did they receive any laying on of hands or become a part of the κληρος [clergy]."⁷¹ However, the fact that deaconesses were singled out for special mention precisely *because* they had not been ordained makes it clear that there was a difference in practice here between the two churches; that is, either the Paulianists or the catholic Church considered deaconesses a nonclerical order and hence did not confer ordination on them. If both churches had viewed them as nonclergy, there would have been no reason to mention them at all.⁷²

68. Pitra, *Iuris ecclesiastici*, 2:435; Carl J. Hefele, *Conciliengeschichte* (Freiburg: Herder, 1873), 1:427.

69. *Ibid.*; Eng. trans. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 102.

70. By contrast, Jerome Cotsonis, "A Contribution to the Interpretation of the 10th Canon of the First Ecumenical Council," *Revue des études byzantines* (Mélanges Raymond Janin) 19 (1961): 190, immediately observes that one of the important questions in this canon is "whether the word refers to the deaconesses of the Paulianists only or to those of the Church too." Unfortunately, Martimort nowhere refers to or cites in his discussion the Cotsonis article, although it was published two decades before Martimort's work. See also Theodorou, "(Χειροτονία) ἢ (χειροθεσία)," 27–32.

71. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 103. Kalsbach, *Altkirchliche Einrichtung*, 46–49, and Gryson, *Ministry of Women*, 48–49, reason similarly. See Cipriano Vagaggini, "L'ordinazione," 155–56.

72. Cotsonis, "Contribution," 190, observes that an assumption that deaconesses in general were not ordained "makes the rest of the text of the canon contradictory to itself. For at the beginning of the same sentence it appears that the canon regards deaconesses as members of the clergy while later it would seem prepared to consider them as being classed merely among the laity." Similarly, Vagaggini, "L'ordinazione," 155–60, notes the illogical contortions to which other, earlier scholars have gone in order to interpret this canon in a way that excludes deaconesses from the clergy, including theorizing different types of deaconesses.

Furthermore, if it were the catholic Church that did not ordain deaconesses or consider them to be clergy, there would have been no reason to mention them since the required re-ordination for Paulianist clergy would have been impossible in the case of the deaconess; everyone would already know that they had lay status.⁷³ The logical inference, then, is that the canon excluded Paulianist deaconesses from the re-ordination possible for other orders because, since they were not ordained in the Paulianist Church, they were considered laypersons, not ordained clergy, even in the heretical church. In other words, the purpose of this canon, as with many of those dealing with the Montanist Church in North Africa, was to try as much as possible to integrate heretical clergy into the catholic clergy so that they could remain with their communities; in the case of deaconesses, however, while it was possible for them to continue their ministry, it was impossible to consider their ministry to be a clerical one, as in the catholic Church, since the Paulianist deaconesses were not ordained clergy.

Jerome Cotsonis provides a particularly attractive solution along these lines by proposing that the text of the canon was corrupted early in its manuscript history. He suggests replacing *tina* [feminine accusative singular of the indefinite article] in the final sentence with *tines* [feminine nominative plural], so that the final sentence would read, "since *some of these women* have received no laying on of hands [*cheirothesian tines*], [they] are thus therefore to be counted among the laity."⁷⁴ Thus, it is apparent that, already by the time of the First Ecumenical Council, female deacons were ordained members of the

73. This is the problem with the interpretation of the canon suggested by L'Huillier, *Church of the Ancient Councils*, 82–83. L'Huillier argues that, since there is no extant ordination rite for female deacons before the *Apostolic Constitutions* (citing the lack of one in the *Apostolic Tradition*), it was probably the Paulianists who had ordained female deacons as opposed to the catholic Church. He furthermore suggests that, "if this phrase concerns deaconesses in general, maybe the fathers of Nicaea wanted to remind people that this type of ministry did not have a priestly character properly speaking," 83. However, the *Apostolic Tradition* is the only extant document containing ordination rites earlier than the *Apostolic Constitutions*; the absence of an ordination rite for deaconesses in this one work does not exclude the possibility of the ordination of deaconesses in other geographical areas, particularly the East. Indeed, it is unlikely that the *Apostolic Constitutions* would include an ordination rite for female deacons only a couple of decades—at most—after the Council of Nicaea in 325 if canon 19 were truly meant to be interpreted as a reminder of a long-standing blanket exclusion of ordained women deacons. (As with Martimort, L'Huillier appears unaware of the Cotsonis article.)

74. Cotsonis, "Contribution," 197. His solution is more plausible than the attempt of Gelasius, in his *Church History*, and two ancient Latin translators to solve the problem by changing the first reference from "deaconesses" to "deacons." See the discussion in L'Huillier, *Church of the Ancient Councils*, 82 and 99, nn. 392 and 393.

clergy, thus necessitating the special provision in canon 19 for women called "deaconesses" in the Paulianist Church who, however, were *not* ordained. The clerical status of deaconesses is even clearer in canon 15 of the Council of Chalcedon, in the middle of the fifth century, which clearly assumed female deacons were ordained clergy who exercised a ministry.⁷⁵

III. THE FEMALE DIACONATE AS A "MAJOR ORDER"

That the deaconess was included not just among the clergy, but specifically among the major orders of clergy, is even more indisputable as one moves further into the Byzantine period. First it is necessary to review the distinction between the two general levels of ordained orders.⁷⁶ All ordained orders had liturgical and/or sacramental functions more or less unique to each. Nevertheless, there were differences in ordination rite and in liturgical function that allow several orders to be grouped together. In the case of the distinction between "major" and "minor" orders, to use more modern terminology, the differences appear to be ones of degree or centrality of function, especially liturgical or sacramental function.⁷⁷ For instance, in the Byzantine Church,⁷⁸ only bishops, presbyters, and deacons could read the petitions of the liturgy.⁷⁹ Those three orders also received the Eucharist at the altar and could distribute it to others,

75. "Διάκονον μὴ χειροτονεῖσθαι γυναῖκα πρὸ ἐτῶν τεσσαράκοντα καὶ ταύτην μετὰ ἀκριβοῦς δοκιμασίας." See n. 13, above. In this regard, L'Huillier, *Church of the Ancient Councils*, 245, argues that "the text of canon 15 of Chalcedon leaves no doubt about the sacramental nature of the feminine diaconate. . . . It is, therefore, clear that at least at this period in the East, we are not dealing with an inferior order."

76. The distinctions which are clear by the end of the middle Byzantine period are incipient but not so clear in the late antique period. In a response to Martimort, written as an appendix to the English translation of his book, Gryson, *Ministry of Women*, 117–18, notes that distinctions between levels of clergy are evident in such early texts as the *Apostolic Constitutions*, but faults Martimort (*Deaconesses*, 75) for failing to consider the differences on their own terms, instead anachronistically applying modern views of ordination and of levels of clergy to the early period: "I believe that 'the concepts of our modern theology' have nothing to do with determining how the *Apostolic Constitutions* regarded the ordination of deaconesses. One cannot say that because our theology is reluctant to accept this ordination as sacramental, the same as that of the male deacons, the *Apostolic Constitutions* could not consider it such." It is possible, however, to recognize differences in clerical levels based on contemporaneous evidence, not on anachronistic applications of modern theology and practice.

77. See, for example, Frank Hawkins, "Orders and Ordination in the New Testament," in *The Study of Liturgy*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 301–20.

78. While this discussion concerns the historical Byzantine Church, the distinctions drawn in this and the following paragraph apply to the modern Eastern Orthodox Church as well.

79. See, for example, the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom in Goar, *Euchologion*, 47–69.

while those in minor orders received Communion with the laity and could not commune others. These differences in liturgical function were reflected in the various rites of ordination.⁸⁰

Moreover, beyond the distinction between major and minor orders, a further distinction must be drawn within the major orders between the diaconate, on the one hand, and the presbytery and episcopacy, on the other hand. Of course, each order had its own character and uniqueness. However, there was a liturgical and sacramental connection between bishop and presbyter that excluded the deacon, already evident in the early church.⁸¹ So, for example, while the deacon could give a blessing in a nonliturgical context, he did not do so during the liturgy, where only the presbyter or bishop could formally bless.⁸² Also, while deacons read the petitions at liturgical services, they did not read the liturgical prayers (including the consecration prayer during the liturgy), which were for presbyter or bishop only; nor could deacons baptize.⁸³ At times, the diaconate seemed to straddle not only the division between major and minor orders, but even the distinction between clergy and laity. For instance, the rites of the Byzantine Church provided a distinct funeral service for presbyters and, by extension, bishops;⁸⁴ deacons, by contrast, were buried according to the rubrics for the laity.

These limitations on the deacon's liturgical role were manifestations of a fundamental liturgical difference between the diaconate and the other two major orders: the deacon could not act as celebrant of any of the sacraments.⁸⁵ After all, in its origin, the diaconate's primary

80. Goar, *Euchologion*, 65–67; the text of the liturgy assumes that both a presbyter and a deacon are serving. Functions of lower orders may be assumed by higher orders, but not vice versa. Thus, the deacon's role (petitions, and so on) would be assumed by a presbyter or bishop serving alone; by contrast, a deacon could not baptize or celebrate the Eucharist. The specific characteristics of the ordination rites are discussed in Section IV, below.

81. Hawkins, "Orders and Ordination," 304.

82. This was typically seen in those few instances where the bishop or presbyter turned to the faithful (the celebrant typically stood at the altar facing east in the same manner as the laity), perhaps made a gesture of blessing (the rubrics are not always specific), and said to the congregation, "Peace be with you" (Εἰρήνη πᾶσι). According to the *Apostolic Constitutions*, VIII, 3, 28, in SC 336:230, blessing was reserved to bishops and presbyters; neither the male nor the female deacon was to bless congregants.

83. *Apostolic Constitutions*, III, 11, in SC 329:146; deacons were permitted only to assist bishops and presbyters. The Latin Church by the medieval period allowed deacons to baptize, but this expansion of the diaconal role never occurred in the East.

84. Goar, *Euchologion*, 451–65.

85. This may be seen in the numerous sacraments and other services in the Goar *Euchologion*. Unlike the Latin Church, the Byzantine Church did not allow a deacon to serve as a witness to matrimony. This was because, as an Orthodox sacramental theology of marriage developed, the cleric marrying the couple was, as with the other sacraments, viewed as the celebrant (note the structure of the wedding—"crowning"—service, in

ministry—as the name suggests—was meant to be pastoral.⁸⁶ By contrast, both presbyter and bishop exercised primary sacramental and liturgical functions, although the distinction between the two orders was unclear (and perhaps nonexistent) in the New Testament church.⁸⁷ Gradually, the presbyters clearly came to be under the authority of the bishop⁸⁸ and to celebrate the sacraments in the stead of the bishop, who alone retained the sacramental authority to ordain.⁸⁹ Thus, it was not coincidental that the presbyter acquired the name “priest” (*hiereus*) and that one of the alternatives to the standard term for bishop (*episkopos*) became “archpriest” (*archiereus*).

Where, then, did the Byzantine deaconess fit in this distinction between major and minor orders? The organization of ordination rites in the Byzantine *euchologia* is informative. Most are organized in descending order,⁹⁰ that is, from presbyter to deacon and deaconess, then to the lower orders of subdeacon, chanter, and reader. Others reverse the order; thus, Goar’s *euchologion*, relying principally on the eleventh-century Grottaferrata *euchologion* from Constantinople, organizes the ordination rites in ascending order, from reader and chanter, to deputy and candle bearer, to subdeacon, and then within “major orders” from deacon to *deaconess* to various ecclesiastical officials (such as archdeacon), to presbyter and finally bishop.⁹¹ What is striking is that, even when the rites are organized in ascending order, the ordination of the female deacon is always placed directly after that of the male deacon. This consistent placement manifestly demonstrates that male and female deacons were considered to be of essentially the same rank or order.⁹²

Moreover, the mid-sixth-century legislation of Justinian provides perhaps the most incontrovertible evidence, outside of the rubrics of the ordination rite itself, that the female deacon in the Byzantine Church not only was regarded as a member of the clergy, but was

ibid., 314–25). By contrast, the Latin Church continued the late antique philosophy embedded in civil law that viewed marriage essentially as an oath or contract; thus, the celebrants were the couple itself, with the cleric acting primarily as witness.

86. *Diakonos* (διάκονος) means “servant”; Acts 6:1–6. For a somewhat controversial revisionist interpretation of the meaning of the term, see John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Reinterpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

87. Hawkins, “Orders and Ordination,” 293–97.

88. This had occurred for at least some of the churches of Asia Minor by the end of the first century, to judge by the letters of Ignatius of Antioch.

89. *Apostolic Constitutions*, III, 11, in SC 329:146.

90. For example, the ordination rites in the eighth-century Barberini *euchologion*, contained in secs. 159–66, follow this descending order; Barberini, 178–90.

91. Goar, *Euchologion*, 194–261.

92. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 151, notes that, in all but one manuscript from the Byzantine period (Sinai gr. 956), this is the case. He draws no conclusions from this, however.

ranked with the major orders of clergy.⁹³ In his Novel 3, the emperor included female deacons among the clergy whose numbers he regulated for the Great Church of Hagia Sophia,⁹⁴ in the prologue listing male and female deacons together,⁹⁵ and later specifying one hundred male and forty female deacons for Hagia Sophia.⁹⁶

Of course, the term “clergy” included both major and minor orders; thus, Novel 3 regulated subdeacons, readers, and chanters, as well as presbyters and deacons (doorkeepers are listed after the total of clergy). However, it is clear, for two reasons, that Justinian ranked the female deacon among the major orders of clergy. First, he consistently listed the female deacon together with the male deacon when discussing clergy in general, normally using the first-declension *diakonos* with the feminine article, although occasionally the feminized noun *diakonissa* was used (sometimes within the same piece of legislation).⁹⁷

Secondly, in Novel 6, the emperor set forth the rules regarding the ordination⁹⁸ of *higher* clergy, limiting the novel to bishops, presbyters, and deacons, both male and female. In fact, the novel is entitled, “Regarding how it is necessary for bishops and presbyters and male and female deacons to be ordained.”⁹⁹ That Justinian—and, thus, presumably the Byzantine Church as a whole¹⁰⁰—considered deaconesses to be part of the higher clergy is further underscored by his prefatory remarks in this novel about the *hierosynē*, or “priesthood” in its broad sense.¹⁰¹ Considering that the novel was limited to the episcopacy, presbyterate, and diaconate, this indicates Justinian’s *hierosynē* to be analogous to what today is termed “major orders.”

However, it appears from other legislation that, although deaconesses were obviously considered part of the clergy, and the higher clergy at that, Justinian and others were not entirely comfortable with

93. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 109–12, discusses Justinian’s novellae but in this context completely sidesteps the question of whether the female diaconate was considered a major order.

94. CIC, vol. 3, *Novellae*, eds. Rudolf Schoell and Guilelmus Kroll (Berlin: Weidmann, 1959), 18.

95. “πρόσους δὲ διακόνους, ἄρρενας τε καὶ θηλείας”; CIC 3:19.

96. Nov. 3, 1, in CIC 3:21. Since the novel limits presbyters to 60, male deacons to 100, female deacons to 40, subdeacons to 90, readers to 110, and chanters to 25, it is clear that female deacons are included among the “most reverend clergy” totaling 425 persons. This novel was reiterated in the *Basilics* III, 2, 1.

97. For example, Nov. 6, 6, in CIC 3:43–45.

98. The Greek word consistently used is χειροτονία, not χειροθεσία; the potential significance of these two terms will be discussed in Section IV, below; see especially n. 124.

99. CIC 3:35.

100. There is no indication that Justinian or any other emperor attempted to impose drastic liturgical change on the Church through legislation; therefore, the logical assumption is that his categorization of the female diaconate reflects the theology of orders of the Byzantine Church generally.

101. CIC 3:35–36.

the idea. The cultural notions that female nature was morally “weaker,”¹⁰² and that male headship—especially in church affairs—needed to be exercised over women who were either lustful or susceptible to seduction,¹⁰³ no doubt influenced Justinian as well as the church as a whole. That women were ordained to major orders likely multiplied the trepidation hierarchs and emperors felt in this regard.

Such cultural biases account for the double standards adhered to for male and female deacons. The requirements for entry to the female diaconate were far more restrictive than for the male diaconate, even in late antiquity, and the penalties for misconduct by female deacons were far more severe than for their male counterparts. As with the other clergy in major orders, female deacons could not marry after their ordination (by contrast, members of all minor orders except subdeacons were permitted to marry).¹⁰⁴ Unlike the male clergy, however, married women could not become deaconesses unless they were separated from their husbands (as with the wives of bishops). As mentioned earlier, deaconesses—just as enrolled widows—originally had to be at least sixty years old;¹⁰⁵ later the age was lowered first to fifty¹⁰⁶ and then to forty.¹⁰⁷

102. For more on late antique and Byzantine notions of the inherent weakness of women, see, for example, part 2, chap. 1, “Incapacités ou exclusions?” in Joëlle Beaucamp, *Le statut de la femme à Byzance (4e–7e siècle)*, vol. 2, *Les pratiques sociales*, Travaux et mémoires, Monograph 6 (Paris: De Boccard, 1992), 273–93; and Hélène Saradi-Mendelovici, “L’ ‘infirmis sexus’ présumée de la moniale Byzantine: doctrine ascétique et pratique juridique,” in *Les femmes et le monachisme byzantin*, ed. Jacques Perreault (Athens: Canadian Archeological Institute, 1991), 87–97. Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 56–62, discusses for late antiquity in general the ambivalence toward the notion of female weakness expressed in law and practice.

103. This philosophy was rooted biblically in 1 Tim. 2:11–12, where women are forbidden to teach because Eve was deceived (hence, she “taught” Adam badly). See, for example, John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*, 3, 2, in PG 48:633.

104. Can. 15 of Chalcedon; in Pitra, *Iuris ecclesiastici*, 1:528. Justinian’s Nov. 6, 6, in CIC 3:43–44. See Joëlle Beaucamp, *Le statut de la femme à Byzance (4e–7e siècle)*, vol. 1, *Le droit imperial*. Travaux et mémoires, Monograph 5 (Paris: De Boccard, 1990), 183; Gryson, *Ministry of Women*, 109–10. For a more general discussion of the restriction on higher clergy’s marrying after ordination, see Patrick Demetrios Viscuso, “A Byzantine Theology of Marriage: The ‘Syntagma kata stoicheion’ of Matthew Blastares” (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1989), 90–92.

105. See n. 12, above. Theodosius specifically refers to the Apostle Paul’s minimum for Widows. Gryson, *Ministry of Women*, 70, notes that the fifth-century Byzantine historian Sozomen, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, 7, 16, 8–11 (Sozomen, GCS, 4:323–24), credits a scandal in the capital with provoking Theodosius to set such a high minimum age. The connection is unclear since, according to Sozomen, the incident involved not a deaconess but an upper-class woman who accused a male deacon of sexual misconduct in connection with a penance prescribed to her by a priest, who was defrocked. See Gryson, *Ministry of Women*, 148, n. 246; Beaucamp, *Le statut de la femme*, 2:355.

106. Nov. 6, 6, in CIC 3:43.

107. However, there were exceptions, such as Olympias, the close friend of St. John Chrysostom, who was widowed quite young and was ordained a deaconess at the age

Judging from the age and marital restrictions, it would appear that the purpose of these restrictions was to ensure that female deacons were as chaste and sexually nonthreatening—perhaps even asexual—as possible.¹⁰⁸ This would also explain why the punishment for sexual misconduct was far harsher for deaconesses than for the male clergy, exemplified most starkly by a provision in Justinian's Novel 6, promulgated in 535, which prescribed the death penalty for any deaconess who broke her vow of celibacy by marrying or engaging in fornication.¹⁰⁹ Such a penalty was far harsher than for laywomen guilty of fornication;¹¹⁰ it was also far harsher than for fornicating subdeacons, deacons, and priests, who were simply reduced to lay status.¹¹¹ Justinian asserted that the deaconess' crime was similar to that of unchaste Vestal Virgins in pagan times and thus deserved the same capital punishment.¹¹² Later emperors lessened the severity of punishment, but even confiscation of property was more severe than the penalty for males committing the same crime.¹¹³ In practice, however, misbehaving deaconesses may have

of twenty-nine or thirty, at about the same time that Theodosius enacted the law setting the minimum age at sixty. Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom*, 112; Elm, *Virgins of God*, 179. Another exception was Irene of Chrysobalanton, who was probably in her early to mid twenties at the time of her ordination. Rosenqvist, *The Life of St Irene*, 28–29, n. 8.

108. It would be anachronistic, particularly for the Constantinopolitan Church, to read into these age restrictions the issue of ritual impurity associated with menstruation. Except for a longstanding, very restrictive tradition in Alexandria and a caution in the fifth-century *Testamentum Domini*, of Syrian provenance, against ordained Widows' approaching the altar during their menses, there is no indication of liturgical restrictions on menstruants in the Byzantine Church prior to the ninth century. To the contrary, church orders from the early Byzantine period in the area of Antioch denounced the imposition of Levitical notions of impurity, explicitly including menstruation. See Section V, below. For more on this subject, see Joan Branham, "Bloody Women and Bloody Spaces: Menses and the Eucharist in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 30:4 (spring 2002): 15–22; Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Menstruants and the Sacred in Judaism and Christianity," in *Women's History and Ancient History*, ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 273–99; G. L. C. Frank, "Menstruation and Motherhood: Christian Attitudes in Late Antiquity," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 19:2 (1993): 185–208; Karras, "The Liturgical Participation of Women," chap. 3, "The Ritual Impurity of Women: Blood and Birth," 88–135; and Patrick Viscuso, "Menstruation: A Problem in Late Byzantine Canon Law," *Études byzantines* (forthcoming). Note that Cohen and Frank treat only the late antique period.

109. "αὐταὶ τε ἐνοχοὶ γενήσονται θανάτου." Nov. 6, 6, in CIC 3:44–45. See Beaucamp, *Le statut de la femme*, 1:183.

110. Ibid.

111. Nov. 6, 5, in CIC 3:42–43; see also Nov. 22, 42, in CIC 3:176.

112. CIC 3:45. By contrast, canon 44 of Basil prescribes seven years' excommunication for a deaconess guilty of fornication with a pagan; Pitra, *luris ecclesiastici*, 1:593. See Beaucamp, *Le statut de la femme*, 2:354; Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 105.

113. Cf. Novel 123, chaps. 14, 29, and 30, in CIC 3:605, 616. Confiscation of the property of a wayward deaconess was retained in the *Basilics* III, 1, 46. For any man who raped a deaconess, nun, or other consecrated woman, the penalty was confiscation of the rapist's property; Nov. 123, chap. 43; *Basilics* IV, 1, 15.

been treated more similarly to male clergy than the imperial legislation would suggest; Joëlle Beaucamp observes that the punishment usually found in the hagiographic literature for sexually misbehaving deaconesses and nuns is defrocking or expulsion from the monastery, respectively.¹¹⁴ Eleven years after Novel 6, Justinian himself, through Novel 123, reduced the penalties in cases where sexual impropriety was unclear. Nevertheless, while the penalties in such cases were similar to those of adultery for laywomen, they were still more severe than for male clerics guilty of the same misconduct.¹¹⁵

Thus, female deacons in the Byzantine Church were restricted in a number of ways in which male deacons were not, apparently because of their incongruous position as women clergy. At the same time, however, it appears that the severity with which deaconesses were regulated was itself a further indication of their rank as members of the higher clergy. Ultimately, however, while the legislative and other material above points clearly to their status as members of major orders, the most telling evidence comes from the ordination rite itself.

IV. THE ORDINATION OF THE BYZANTINE DEACONESS

While the categorization of ordained orders into “major” and “minor” is anachronistic, the idea is not new of distinguishing ranks of clergy by differences in the rite of ordination, as well as by liturgical function. Hence, the crucible for the controversy over the status of the female diaconate in the early and Byzantine Church has been the rite of ordination. As early as the fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions*,¹¹⁶ there are clear differences between the ordinations of presbyter and

114. Beaucamp, *Le statut de la femme*, 2:340. Beaucamp, *ibid.*, 276, n. 34, also cites Sozomen (*Ecclesiastical History* IV, 24, 16, in GCS, 4:181), who mentions a deaconess named Nektaria, who was excommunicated for violating her “contracts” (συνθήκαι) and “vows” (ὄρκου).

115. The penalties under Novel 123 were similar to those that soon after would be instituted for adultery (that is, imprisonment in a monastery and loss of property). But, Beaucamp notes that this novel (chaps. 14 and 29), as with Novel 6, again is more lenient with male clerics (priests, deacons, and subdeacons), requiring only their defrocking and turning over their property to the diocese that they served. In other words, male clerics retained their personal freedom, including their freedom to marry. Beaucamp, *Le statut de la femme*, 2:184; see also 210. L’Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils*, 247, similarly comments on the severity of canonical punishment in canon 15 of Chalcedon for deaconesses who marry (defrocking and excommunication) vis-à-vis their male counterparts (defrocking only), but he theorizes unconvincingly that its rationale lies in the maturity expected of the deaconess because of her greater age.

The symbolic status of deaconesses and other consecrated women with respect to the honor of the Church, “as the bride of Christ,” can also be discerned in the harsh penalty (cutting off the nose) prescribed in the ninth-century *Basilics* for those who behaved lewdly toward these women. *Basilics* LX, 37, 76.

116. VIII, 16–21, in SC 336:216–22.

deacon, on the one hand, and those of subdeacon and reader, on the other hand.¹¹⁷ The ordination rites in the document are brief, omitting most rubrics and not even describing when the ordination is to be performed (that is, its larger liturgical context).

Nevertheless, there are discernible differences for different levels of clergy. The rubrics for the ordination of presbyter and deacon call for the candidate to be ordained "in the presence of" those of their own order and above.¹¹⁸ For example, the deacon is to be ordained by the bishop's laying hands on him "in the presence of the whole presbytery, and of the deacons."¹¹⁹ By contrast, the rites for subdeacon and reader call for the bishop simply to lay hands upon the candidate.¹²⁰ Although there are no rubrics describing where these ordinations take place, the phrase "in the presence of" the other higher clergy implies that the ordinations of presbyter, deacon, and deaconess probably were performed in the altar area, where the other clergy would have been present at the *synthronon*.¹²¹ In the case of the deaconess, the *Apostolic Constitutions* calls for the bishop to "lay thy hands upon in the presence of the presbytery, and of the deacons and deaconesses."¹²² Thus, even the meager information gleaned from the *Apostolic Constitutions'* ordination rite for the deaconess suggests that the deaconess was placed among the major orders.¹²³

117. The liminal position of the deaconess has engendered vociferous disagreement over her status. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites*, 84, declines to participate in the debate between Gryson and Martimort over whether the deaconess in the *Apostolic Constitutions* was sacramentally ordained, arguing that such a debate "may not only be anachronistic but also oversimplistic: the categorization of the liturgical ministries of the early Church cannot be reduced to a simple division between clergy and laity."

118. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 69, notes this distinction, but fails to comment on it with respect to the ordination of the deaconess, whereas Gryson, *Ministry of Women*, 115–20, finds it suggestive of the higher clerical status of the deaconess. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites*, 85, notes the similarities between the *Apostolic Constitutions* and the later Byzantine rite both in the analogous general structure and in the minor differences between the ordination rites of deacon and deaconess.

119. *Apostolic Constitutions*, VIII, 17, in SC 336:218; Eng. trans. "Apostolic Constitutions," in *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (hereafter ANF), vol. 7, reprint ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 492.

120. VIII, 20–21, in SC 336:220–22.

121. The *synthronon* was a type of mini-amphitheater, that is, a series of raised levels in a semicircular shape, lining the sanctuary apse in early Christian churches in the East. This architectural feature may still be seen in certain ancient churches, such as Hagia Eirene in Constantinople (Istanbul). See Thomas F. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 143–52.

122. VIII, 19, in SC 336:220; Eng. trans. ANF 7:492.

123. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites*, observes that "the word 'ordination' [*cheirotonia*] does not appear at the beginning of the instruction concerning deaconesses" and suggests that "this omission may be intended to indicate a subtle distinction in status." However, he

By the middle Byzantine period, the distinction is clearer between major and minor orders, in part through increasing, though not yet complete, consistency in the use of the ordination terms *cheirotomia* and *cheirothesia*.¹²⁴ In his seminal work on the distinctions between these two types of ordination, Greek theologian and church historian Panayiotis Trembelas notes that the *cheirothesia* rite—for ordination to lower orders—is characterized principally by (1) its physical location outside the *bema* (altar area); and (2) its temporal location outside of the divine liturgy.¹²⁵ By contrast, the *cheirotomia* type of ordination—that is, for major orders—occurs at the *bema* and in the course of the Divine Liturgy;¹²⁶ in addition, there is an allusion to the candidate's election to the clerical order. The terms were still in flux in the middle Byzantine period—for example, *cheirotomia* was used in the *euchologia* for the subdeacon's ordination, although it followed the *cheirothesia* format¹²⁷—but the distinction Trembelas draws on the basis of physical and liturgical location is clear and consistent. Bishops, presbyters, and deacons were ordained at the altar in the course of the liturgy; subdeacons, readers, and so on, were not.

It is easier to distinguish among the orders for the middle Byzantine period than for the early church or early Byzantine period based on these ritual characteristics because the rubrics for the various ordinations are much fuller and more specific in the Byzantine *euchologia* than in the earlier *Apostolic Constitutions*. Two important *euchologia* from the middle Byzantine period that preserve the ordination rite of the female deacon together with other major and minor orders

does not respond to Gryson, *Ministry of Women*, 118, who, upon examination of the critical apparatus, concluded "that the formulas in question *peri de cheirotomias presbyterōn* and others were wrongly inserted by Funk in the current text, and that in fact, these titles had been introduced later on into part of the manuscript tradition." See Francis X. Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1905). Marcel Metzger's more recent critical edition, in SC 336, reproduces the same titles. The apparatus shows that the wording in these section titles is variable in the manuscript traditions, so Gryson may be correct; Funk and Metzger's editorial choices could have been predicated on the assumption that women were not truly ordained.

124. For a thorough discussion of the history of the use of these two terms and of their significance in terms of the distinction in ordination rites, see Panagiotis Trembelas, "Τάξεις χειροθεσιῶν καὶ χειροτονιῶν," *Theologia* 19:2-3; 20:1 (1941-48; 1949); Cyrille Vogel, "Chirotonie et chirothésie: Importance et relativité du geste de l'imposition des mains dans la collation des ordres," *Irénikon* 45 (1972): 7-21, 207-38; and Vagaggini, "L'ordinazione," 179-80, esp. n. 2. Vogel, 10, observes that the distinction in meaning between these two heretofore interchangeable terms begins in the eighth century and even then only in some juridical and didactic works. L'Huillier, *Church of the Ancient Councils*, 243, agrees with Vogel regarding the instability of the two terms prior to the Second Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (787).

125. Trembelas, "Τάξεις," 452.

126. Trembelas, "Τάξεις," 456; Taft, "Women at Church," 63-64.

127. Barberini, 188; Goar, *Euchologion*, 203.

are the eighth-century Barberini codex 336¹²⁸ from a Greek-speaking region of Italy and an eleventh-century codex from Constantinople, Grottaferrata G.b.I., the primary manuscript source for the massive *euchologion* collection published by Goar in the seventeenth century.¹²⁹ The rites and prayers for the ordination of the deaconess in the two manuscripts are identical. Given their geographic and chronological separation, this indicates that in the Byzantine period the ordination rite for the female diaconate was widespread and standardized, thereby suggesting that so was the order itself.¹³⁰

As for the content of the ordination rite for the female deacon, the most outstanding feature is that, far more explicitly than in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, its structure is analogous to the ordination of the male deacon; in fact, while the prayers are distinct for the two ordinations, the wording of the rubrics is virtually identical,¹³¹ a point underscored in Goar by a separate, short set of rubrics that instructed that "One must perform [the ordination rite] for the deaconess as for male deacons, except for a few things."¹³²

According to the Barberini and Grottaferrata *euchologia*, the deaconess was ordained during the Eucharist, at exactly the same point in the liturgy as for the male deacon—that is, immediately following the end

128. The ordination rite for the deaconess is found in secs. 163–64, in *Barberini*, 185–88.

129. This manuscript is also known as the Bessarion codex; the ordination of the deaconess appears in Goar, *Euchologion*, 218–22. The ordination rites are preserved in a third principal *euchologion*, Paris BN Coislin 213, written in 1027, but it is very similar to the Grottaferrata manuscript; Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites*, 7. There is also a tenth-century manuscript from the library of the monastery of St. Katherine, known as Sinai 956, and several late Byzantine manuscripts. For a discussion of these, see Miguel Arranz, "Les sacrements de l'ancien euchologe constantinopolitain (I)," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 48 (1982): 284–335, and Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 150, regarding the placement of the ordination rite. Theodorou, "〈Χειροτονία〉 ἢ 〈χειροθεσία〉," 576–88, analyzes the texts specifically with reference to the ordination rite for the deaconess.

130. Caution should be exercised due to the archaizing tendency of the Byzantines; thus, the tendency to preserve texts intact may simply mean that the female diaconate was indeed widespread in the early Byzantine period but may not necessarily indicate that this was still the case at the time the *euchologia* were written. For instance, regarding Constantine Porphyrogenitus' *De administrando imperio*, sister volume to his *De ceremoniis*, Alexander Kazhdan notes in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, eds. Alexander P. Kazhdan and others (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1:593, that "one must distinguish between the date of compilation . . . and the date of texts included." Nevertheless, on the basis of the *vita* of St. Irene Chrysobalanton, as well as the fragmentary but presumably reliable sigillographic and diplomatic evidence from Byzantine Italy (see nn. 36, 42, and 47, above), we know that at least through the eighth century in southern Italy and the ninth or tenth century in Constantinople and Jerusalem, some women were still being ordained as deacons.

131. Taft, "Women at Church," 63, asserts that "the detailed rubrics . . . show an almost exact parallelism between the rite for instituting deacons and deaconesses."

132. Goar, *Euchologion*, 219. A canonist of the fourteenth century, Matthew Blastares, *Collectio alphabetica*, letter Γ, chap. 11, quotes this text almost verbatim; in PG 144:1176.

of the *anaphora* section, after the royal doors are reopened.¹³³ As with the male deacon, she was brought to the archbishop¹³⁴ (an indication that the ordination occurred at the altar, where he would be at that point in the liturgy¹³⁵). She bent her head as the archbishop placed his hand on it; then, making a cross three times (presumably, over her head), the archbishop read the following prayer:

Holy and almighty God, who through the birth of your only-begotten Son and our God from the Virgin according to the flesh sanctified the female, and not to men alone but also to women bestowed grace and the advent of your Holy Spirit; now, Lord, look upon this your servant and call her to the work of your diaconate, and send down upon her the abundant gift of your Holy Spirit; keep her in orthodox faith, in blameless conduct, always fulfilling her ministry according to your pleasure; because to you is due all glory and honor . . .¹³⁶

There followed a litany, with the sixth petition specifically on behalf of the “now appointed deaconess, and her salvation. That our loving God will bestow on her a spotless and irreproachable diaconate, [let us pray] to the Lord.”¹³⁷ With the archbishop again placing his hand on the head of the woman he was ordaining, he followed the litany with a second consecration prayer:

Lord, Lord, who do not reject women offering themselves and wishing to minister in your holy houses in accordance with what is fitting, but receive them in an order of ministers; bestow the grace of your Holy Spirit also on this your servant who wishes to offer herself to you, and fill her with the grace of the diaconate, as you gave the grace of your diaconate to Phoebe whom you called to the work of

133. Bar. 163.2, in *Barberini*, 185; Goar, *Euchologion*, 218. The *anaphora* is the central portion of the Divine Liturgy, culminating in the consecration of the bread and wine.

134. The Barberini codex consistently uses the word “archbishop” (ἀρχιεπίσκοπος), while the Grottaferrata manuscript used by Goar primarily uses “archbishop,” but occasionally “bishop.” The use of the word “archbishop” probably indicates the *euchologion*’s original provenance of Constantinople.

135. Literally, she is “offered” (προσφέρεται), or perhaps “offers herself”; Bar. 163.2, in *Barberini*, 185; *Euchologion*, 218. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 172, quotes Balsamon, *Responsa* 35, in PG 138:988, as asserting, in answer to a question posed him by Patriarch Mark III of Alexandria, that “formerly [πάλαι] there were sometimes recognized orders [τάγματα] of deaconesses, and they too had their place in the sanctuary [βαθμὸν ἐν τῷ βήματι].” Remarkably, Martimort states that Theodore is wrong because “at no time did deaconesses in the Byzantine rite ever have access to the sanctuary,” despite his earlier admission (152) that, “even if the place of ordination was not always specified, . . . that place was evidently the sanctuary, because the doors remained open and the candidate had to advance toward the bishop; nowhere is it specified that the bishop had to leave the altar.”

136. Bar. 163.3, in *Barberini*, 185–86; Goar, *Euchologion*, 218; Eng. trans. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites*, 138.

137. Bar. 164.6, in *Barberini*, 186; Goar, *Euchologion*, 218; Eng. trans. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites*, 138.

ministry. Grant to her, O God, to persevere blamelessly in your holy temples, to cultivate appropriate conduct, and especially moderation, and make your servant perfect, that standing at the judgment-seat of your Christ she may receive the worthy reward of her good conduct. By the mercy and love for humanity of your only-begotten Son . . .¹³⁸

After the "amen," the archbishop then vested the ordinand with the diaconal *orarion* (a long stole symbolic of the diaconal office), placing it around her neck, under her *maphorion*, and bringing the two ends of the stole around to the front.¹³⁹ Finally, the newly ordained female deacon received Communion at the hand of the archbishop, who then gave her the chalice, which she received and placed back on the altar.¹⁴⁰ In addition, at the end of the ordination rite for the male deacon (that is, immediately before the ordination rite for the deaconess), there is a postscript in both the Barberini and Grottaferrata codices noting that this is the ritual for ordaining a deacon or deaconess during the normal divine liturgy,¹⁴¹ but that the ordination may also be done during a presanctified liturgy, the only difference being that the placement of the ordination during the service is slightly different because there is no *anaphora* in a presanctified liturgy.¹⁴²

The similarities between the texts for the ordination of deacon and deaconess are striking. The prayers are different¹⁴³ but contain the same basic elements, including an *epiclesis* (invocation of the Holy Spirit) and a reference to God's calling them to this office. The litany is identical, with the obvious exception of the use of the feminine form when referring to the ordinand in the sixth petition. In terms of rubrics, there are only a few differences: (1) the deaconess bowed her head instead of kneeling; (2) she was not vested with a liturgical tunic,¹⁴⁴ and the way in which she was vested with the *orarion* was different from the male deacon; (3) the deaconess was not given a kiss

138. Bar. 164.10, in *Barberini*, 187–88; Goar, *Euchologion*, 218; Eng. trans. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites*, 138.

139. Bar. 164.11, in *Barberini*, 188; Goar, *Euchologion*, 218–19. The *maphorion* was a loose garment covering the head and shoulders worn by respectable Byzantine women. Byzantine icons usually show the Virgin Mary and female saints so attired (certain ascetic saints, such as Mary of Egypt, being obvious exceptions).

140. Bar. 164.13, in *Barberini*, 188; Goar, *Euchologion*, 219.

141. Literally, "when there is a *proskomide* service," that is, a service of preparation of the bread and wine for consecration during the Eucharist. Bar. 162.14, in *Barberini*, 184; Goar, *Euchologion*, 211.

142. Bar. 162.15, in *Barberini*, 185; Goar, *Euchologion*, 211.

143. The differences in the two sets of prayers are discussed below.

144. The text for the ordination of the male deacon says that the bishop "ἐπαίρεται τὸ φελῶνν" ("lifts up and sets on [the deacon] the *phelonin*"); Bar. 162.11, in *Barberini*, 184.

by the archbishop; (4) she was not given a *ripidion* (liturgical fan) to carry in procession or with which to fan the Holy Gifts; and (5) when the archbishop gave the deaconess the chalice after she had received Communion, she placed it back on the altar rather than taking it out of the sanctuary in order to distribute Communion to the laity.

As noted earlier, modern scholars have been far from unanimous in their analysis of this ordination rite, variously weighting the significance of the differences between the male and female deacons' ordinations. Some scholars find the similarities strong enough to assert that the female diaconate in the Byzantine Church constituted a major order.¹⁴⁵ Others have focused on the differences noted above and claim that it definitely was not,¹⁴⁶ while a few express ambivalence or simply avoid dealing with the issue, considering the female diaconate so unique and anomalous in the history and theology of clerical orders that they cannot place it definitively within either the major or minor category.¹⁴⁷

It is worth examining the differences that do occur between the rites for male and female deacons to ascertain if they are significant in terms of a theology of orders, or if they are relatively minor and may be accounted for by other reasons. The most significant difference is in the consecration prayers;¹⁴⁸ in fact, unlike the rest of the rite, there is almost no textual correspondence between the prayers for male and female deacons. Martimort argues that the difference in content between the two sets of prayers is substantial and indicates a considerable difference in function,¹⁴⁹ but his arguments are strained and

This garment is apparently what would become known as the *stikharion*, and should not be confused with the *phelonion*, or chasuble, worn by presbyters.

145. Among the first who argued for its placement among the major orders was Theodorou, "*Χειροτονία* ἢ *χειροθεσία*," 576–601. FitzGerald, *Women Deacons*, 78–110, while presenting the opposing view of John Karmiris, relies heavily on Theodorou's conclusions, and agrees with him. See also Vagaggini, "L'ordinazione," 177–85, and Taft, "Women at Church," 63–64, who supports this position since he clearly understands the ordination to be a "cheirotonia rite."

146. Opponents of the view that women deacons in the Byzantine Church were members of major orders include Vlassios Pheidias, "The Question of the Priesthood of Women," in *The Place of the Woman in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women*, ed. Gennadios Limouris (Katerini, Greece: Tertios, 1992), 186–89, and Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 156.

147. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites*, 88–89, may fall into this category since he makes no comment on the level of the order and, regarding the earlier *Apostolic Constitutions*, expresses his disquiet with anachronistic and oversimplistic categorizations of historical clerical orders (see n. 117, above). Nevertheless, in his review of the ordination rites of various orders, he treats the deaconess immediately after the deacon and before what he titles "minor orders"; Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites*, 83–103.

148. FitzGerald, *Women Deacons*, 82–101, offers a combination of theological with pastoral reflection on the two consecration prayers.

149. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 155–56.

unconvincing. For instance, he claims that the prayers for the male deacon refer specifically to his being a deacon by using the word "deacon" (*diakonos*), for example "the work of the deacon" (*to tou diakonou ergon*), but that, in the prayers for the female deacon, "reference was made only to διακονία, which was a very general and very imprecise term, translated as readily by 'service' as by 'diaconate.'" ¹⁵⁰ It is true that *diakonia* and *diakonos* have both generic and technical meanings. In this case, however, it strains common sense and violates the liturgical context of the prayers to understand the word *diakonia* as generic rather than technical when the prayers are for someone being ordained a *diakonos*. Certainly, Bradshaw feels that the term refers specifically to the diaconate in these prayers; hence, his translation of the key passages in the two consecration prayers: "the work of your diaconate" and "the grace of the diaconate."¹⁵¹

On the other hand, Martimort discounts two very important similarities in the consecration prayers. One is the *epiclesis*, which in the case of the female ordination rite, according to Martimort, indicated "that deaconesses were entering upon a state of life aimed at perfection,"¹⁵² as opposed to their receiving a specific grace conferred at ordination. His attempt to relativize its importance in the deaconess' ordination by reference to an *epiclesis* for minor orders in the *Apostolic Constitutions* is undercut, however, by his own admission that, "in the Byzantine rite, the Holy Spirit is invoked upon neither lectors nor subdeacons."¹⁵³ The second similarity is God's call to the ordinand, which Martimort implies was given to Phoebe but not to the candidate since the deaconess' willingness and desire is explicitly mentioned in her second prayer;¹⁵⁴ however, Martimort neglects to mention that the first prayer specifically asks God to "call her to the work of your diaconate," followed by the *epiclesis*, "and send down upon her the abundant gift of your Holy Spirit."¹⁵⁵

However, perhaps the most astounding example of Martimort's bias is his attempt to impose a difference where one does not exist, namely, at the beginning of the rite, where in the case of both male and female deacon, the rubrics state that the bishop intoned a prayer

150. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 156.

151. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites*, 138.

152. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 155.

153. *Ibid.*

154. *Ibid.*

155. Bar. 163.3, in *Barberini*, 186; Goar, *Euchologion*, 218. Eng. trans. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites*, 138.

beginning "*Hē theia charis*" ("The divine grace").¹⁵⁶ For neither sex is the full text of the prayer given in the *euchologia*,¹⁵⁷ but it is common to the ordination rite for all three major orders in the middle Byzantine period.¹⁵⁸ Martimort, however, seizes upon the opportunity presented by the omission of the full text of the prayer to extrapolate from a sixteenth-century *euchologion* that uses, for the consecration of abbots and stewards, a prayer beginning the same way but with different content since those are consecrations as opposed to ordinations. He justifies by tautological reasoning this backward projection from what is clearly not an ordination: "Surely this text could not have been the same one as was used at other ordinations, where the supposition always existed that the candidate already possessed the preceding degree of ministry."¹⁵⁹ However, it is unreasonable to infer a different prayer for the female deacon's ordination, particularly since the full text of the prayer is *not* given. That the *euchologia* cite only the incipit clearly indicates that it was the same prayer for both male and female deacon, as well as for presbyter and bishop.¹⁶⁰

While there is no theologically significant difference in the ordination prayers, Martimort is correct, however, in noting that there are differences in the liturgical functions of male and female deacons in the Byzantine Church. Not all differences in the rubrics, however, may be ascribed to differences in liturgical function, much less to differences in the level of ordination implied. For instance, with respect to the first and third differences noted above, Bradshaw has suggested that both the female ordinand's kneeling before the bishop and her receiving a kiss from him may have been considered inappropriate actions within Byzantine society; even a late Byzantine canonist, Matthew Blastares, saw nothing substantive in the female deacon's failure to kneel, instead assigning the rubrical difference to

156. Bar. 161.3 for the deacon, 163.2 for the deaconess, in *Barberini*, 181 and 185; Goar, *Euchologion*, 211 and 218. FitzGerald, *Women Deacons*, 80–82, gives the full text of the prayer from other sources and comments upon its significance.

157. In fact, Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 153, notes that no existing manuscript contains the complete text.

158. See, for example, Goar, *Euchologion*, 242 and 244, for the presbyter and bishop, respectively.

159. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 153.

160. In fact, L'Huillier, 244, argues the opposite from Martimort based on this very prayer. He notes that, although the ordination status of the deaconess in the early church may be ambiguous, the Byzantine female deacon clearly "acquired all the characteristics of accession to higher orders, as professor E. Theodorou has noted, since the formula 'the grace divine' is used." Taft, "Women at Church," 64, also finds the prayer incipit significant; see n. 126, above.

the deaconess' "weakness."¹⁶¹ As has already been made evident in other areas of deaconesses' historical liturgical participation, such as baptism and receiving the Eucharist at home, propriety has played an important role both in excluding women and including them in various ways. Thus, while it is conceivable that the rubrics for the deaconess to remain standing reflect her lack of public ministry at the altar, it more likely is simply a matter of propriety or "chivalry." In any case, Martimort's invocation of the symbolism of pseudo-Dionysius in stressing the importance of the act of kneeling appears misplaced.

Nevertheless, the remaining three differences are indeed connected to liturgical function. The female deacon in the Byzantine Church did not perform the public liturgical functions of the male deacon in the Divine Liturgy; thus, she was not given a *ripidion* in order to fan the Holy Gifts.¹⁶² Similarly, while the female deacon delivered the Eucharist to housebound women, she did not distribute it during the Divine Liturgy; therefore, when the bishop gave her the chalice after administering Communion to her, she simply returned it to the altar.¹⁶³

The final difference—that the female deacon does not wear a liturgical tunic and that she is vested with the *orarion*¹⁶⁴ in a different manner from the male deacon—similarly reflects a difference in liturgical function, but does not indicate a difference in the clerical orders'

161. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites*, 88. Similar concerns are apparent in the requirement that even the female deacon wear the *maphorion*, which was considered proper woman's attire among the Byzantines and which reflected the Apostle Paul's injunction in 1 Corinthians 11 that women prophesy with their heads covered. As for Matthew Blastares' allusion to the deaconess' "weakness," this may refer either to generic "feminine weakness" (see n. 102, above) or to the more advanced age of female deacons relative to male deacons at the time of ordination; Blastares, *Collectio alphabetica*, letter Γ, chap. 11, in PG 144:1176.

162. Cf. Bar. 161.11 and 164.11, in Barberini, 184 and 188; Goar, *Euchologion*, 209 and 218–19; cf. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 156.

163. Cf. Bar. 161.13 and 164.13, in Barberini, 184 and 188; Goar, *Euchologion*, 209 and 219; see Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 154. Since there was no liturgical reason for the bishop to give the chalice to the deaconess, FitzGerald, *Women Deacons*, 102, cites a Swedish scholar named Brodd who suggests that it may have been a relic of an earlier practice of deaconesses distributing the Eucharist at the liturgy. However, there is no contemporaneous evidence to support this hypothesis. It seems likelier that it was simply a desire to parallel the male and female deacons' ordination rites as closely as possible to each other, limiting differences to those necessitated either by propriety or by differing liturgical functions.

164. For a fuller discussion of the *orarion*, see S. Salaville and G. Nowack, *Le rôle du diacre dans la liturgie orientale: Étude d'histoire et de liturgie*, Archives de l'orient chrétien, vol. 3 (Paris; Athens: Institut Français d'Études Byzantines, 1962); and, especially, G. A. Soteriou, "Τὸ ὄράριον τοῦ διακόνου ἐν τῇ Ἀνατολικῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ," *Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἑπετηρὶς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς τοῦ ἐν Ἀθήνῃσι Πανεπιστημίου*, 1:3 (1926): 405–90.

respective rank.¹⁶⁵ As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the female deacon did not perform the public liturgical functions of the male deacon; these included reading petitions as well as participating in liturgical processions and distributing the Eucharist during the Divine Liturgy. Therefore, as with presbyters or male deacons who were not among the clerical celebrants for a particular liturgy,¹⁶⁶ she wore no liturgical tunic; in the case of the deaconess, there was no need to vest her with the tunic at all since her duties would never require her to wear it.

As for the *orarion*, the deaconess essentially wore it in the same manner as the subdeacon (that is, with both ends brought to the front), while the male deacon's stole hung from one shoulder or, for an archdeacon, circled diagonally around the body from one shoulder, with the two ends crossing and hanging down, front and back, from the shoulder. This difference, too, had a functional basis, since the male deacon held up the front half of his *orarion* while reciting petitions;¹⁶⁷ the deaconess would not be reading petitions. Conversely, the male deacon did not always wear his stole over one shoulder. During the Lord's Prayer he rewrapped it around him so that he then was vested with it in the same manner as the subdeacon and deaconess.¹⁶⁸

Again, the reason for changing the manner in which the male deacon wore the *orarion* was liturgical function. While neither middle Byzantine liturgical commentaries nor the rubrics of the *euchologia* of that period make any mention of this, frescoes mimicking liturgical acts, such as the Communion of the Apostles, show that typically the hands were covered when handling liturgical vessels (see the figure on the left in Figure 1). Neither deacon nor deaconess wore the large, cape-like *phelonion*, which the presbyter used to cover his hands; rather, they would have used the two ends of the *orarion* for that purpose.¹⁶⁹ Thus, male and female deacon in fact *were* vested

165. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 154, suggests this by commenting on the extension of the *orarion* to the subdeacon, in contravention of canon 22 of the fourth-century council of Laodicea.

166. A presbyter not serving at the liturgy, or one officiating at a noneucharistic service such as those from the liturgy of the hours, would not be fully vested, but would wear only the *epitrachelion*, which was the particular stole symbolizing his priesthood.

167. Balsamon, in PG 137:1369; in Soteriou, "Τὸ ὀράριον," 457.

168. Peter D. Day, *The Liturgical Dictionary of Eastern Christianity* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical [A Michael Glazier Book], 1993), 213.

169. See Soteriou, "Τὸ ὀράριον," 433. In addition to the occasional evidence provided by such illuminated manuscripts as the tenth-century Athens gr. 211, fol. 110v, and the fourteenth-century Brit. Mus. Add. 39627, fol. 202r, numerous frescoes from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries of the Communion of the Apostles depict apostles approaching the chalice with their hands veiled, including St. Sophia in Ohrid (eleventh



FIG. 1. Fresco of the Communion of the Apostles, Hagia Sophia, Ochrid, 1037–56 AD. Courtesy Wilhelm Schmitz Verlag.

identically with the *orarion* at the time of Communion in order to hold the chalice during reception of the Eucharist.

It deserves mention in this context that, in contrast to the extensive literary evidence of the female diaconate in the Byzantine Church, there is a complete lack of visual evidence. No vested deaconess saints appear in Byzantine-era frescoes, although their male counterparts, such as Stephen and Laurence, are typically shown vested. For example, the north (funerary) chapel of a monastic church in Cappadocia known as Ayvali Kilise preserves a rare tenth-century fresco of St. Olympias, friend and patron of St. John Chrysostom.¹⁷⁰ The fresco is

century); and monastic churches in Studenica (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), and Gracanica and Čučer (fourteenth century). Photos of many of these frescoes (including Figure 1 above) appear in Richard Hamann-Mac Lean and Horst Hallensleben, *Die Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien vom 11. bis zum frühen 14. Jahrhundert*, Osteuropastudien der Hochschulen des Landes Hessen, Reihe 2, Band 3 (Giessen: W. Schmitz, 1963).

170. Nicole Thierry and Michel Thierry, "Ayvali Kilise ou Pigeonnier de Gülli Dere: Église inédite de Cappadoce," *Cahiers archéologiques* 15 (1965): 126–27.

rather badly deteriorated; nevertheless, it appears that she is dressed identically to the other holy women, not vested as a deaconess.

It is difficult to form any conclusions from her secular attire, however. On the one hand, certainly she would have been known to be a deaconess since that information was contained in the *menaion* and *synaxarion*¹⁷¹ accounts of her life (she must have been familiar to the monks for them to have commemorated her on the wall of the church, although she might have been included because a relative of the founder or other monk shared the same name). On the other hand, the fresco is dated to sometime between 913 and 920,¹⁷² by which time the lack of provincial evidence shows the female diaconate in the Byzantine Church to be in decline, at least outside of Constantinople and Jerusalem, and possibly Byzantine Italy. It is quite likely that monks in tenth-century Cappadocia, in central Asia Minor, would never actually have seen an ordained deaconess. Therefore, the iconographer (who may even have been a member of the community, although the quality of the work is far from primitive¹⁷³) would not have known how to depict one.

In addition, the rite of ordination examined above shows that the female deacon did not wear a liturgical tunic. It also indicates that the bishop placed the *orarion* under the *maphorion* which covered the deaconess' head and shoulders, making the *orarion* rather difficult to see in an icon, particularly given the pattern of fabric folds common in Byzantine iconography. Therefore, the lack of visual evidence of vested deaconesses, particularly since relatively little pre-iconoclastic religious art remains extant, is probably not significant.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the ordination rite for the female deacon, and the one that most obviously demonstrates that the female diaconate was considered a major order, is that the deaconess received the Eucharist at the altar with the rest of the higher clergy.¹⁷⁴ Although the *euchologia* do not give the order of reception of Communion in the rubrics for the normal celebration of the Divine

171. The *menaion* (from the Greek word for "month"—there were twelve *menaia*) contained the special hymns and readings, including short *vitae* of the relevant saints, associated with the calendar feasts. The *synaxarion* provided only the saints' lives, but at greater length.

172. Thierry and Thierry, "Ayvalie Kilise," 101.

173. Thierry and Thierry, "Ayvalie Kilise," 99.

174. This differs from the *Apostolic Constitutions*, VIII, 13, 14, in SC 336:208–10, whose rubrics place the deaconess at the head of the ordained and consecrated women who receive the Eucharist, after all the ordained and consecrated men, including lower orders and monks. This may simply reflect the segregation of the sexes, however, since all the ordained and consecrated men are listed first (in descending order), followed by the ordained and consecrated women, then by the children and the rest of the laity.

Liturgy,¹⁷⁵ the order followed at ordination would have been followed more generally. It is possible, of course, that female deacons, not having the liturgical altar duties of their male counterparts, remained outside the altar area and communed with the laity and noncelebrating clergy. On the other hand, it seems incongruous to postulate that the female deacon in the Byzantine Church was vested with the *orarion* and received Communion at the altar at her ordination, but then functioned liturgically completely as a layperson thereafter. Rather, it is reasonable to assume that female deacons—at least those “on duty” for a particular liturgy—were vested with the *orarion* and thus received Communion at the altar as the last of the major orders of clergy to do so. At some later point, when deaconesses were no longer ordained, they would have remained outside the altar and received Communion with the rest of the laity.

V. THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE FEMALE DIACONATE

The question of how long female deacons did survive as an ordained order is difficult to answer. Since *euchologia* often retained archaic and obsolete practices, the mere appearance of an ordination rite for female deacons, as discussed previously, does not necessarily confirm the existence of ordained female deacons at the time the liturgical manual was written. On the other hand, the *euchologia* did change over time,¹⁷⁶ so defunct rituals that new manuscripts continued to include were probably not so far removed from the time of the manuscript’s creation as to be beyond some oral tradition or collective memory, particularly when that ritual was as unique as the ordination, at the altar, of a female deacon.

Moreover, the fact that one of the liturgical functions of Byzantine deaconesses in the late middle period was chanting indicates the likelihood of their ordained status continuing well into that period, since chanting duties were normally performed by ordained clergy, particularly in the large cathedrals. Male chanters were ordained to the minor order of reader; the only order of female chanters (apart from nuns) for which we have information are in fact deaconesses. Of

175. As mentioned earlier, the rubrics assume only a presbyter and deacon.

176. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 173, provides two examples of *euchologia* from the late and post-Byzantine period that do not contain the ordination rite for female deacons, observing that “not all of the copyists, of course, were slaves to routine to the same degree.” The *Goar euchologion* includes variations in ordination and other rites based on several manuscripts. Moreover, there are some striking differences between the eighth-century Barberini 336 codex and the tenth-century Grottaferrata manuscript, for example, in the service of the forty-day blessing after the birth of a child. See nn. 188 and 189, below.

course, the documentary evidence demonstrates that Byzantine deaconesses continued liturgical chanting—for a time, at least—even after they ceased to be ordained, but the Patriarch Athanasius' *entolima* in the early fourteenth century demonstrates the suspicion and discomfort with which the church viewed an order that was no longer actually an ordained order. In all probability, the Constantinopolitan patriarch's proscription against the "custom" of deaconesses evidences the final loss of any widespread institutional memory of the *ordained* order of female deacons.¹⁷⁷

Thus, female deacons in the Byzantine Church appear to have reached their zenith in the early Byzantine period, where there is a plethora of archaeological, canonical, legislative, liturgical, and hagiographic evidence not only for Constantinople but for Asia Minor as well. By contrast, in the middle Byzantine period, particularly following iconoclasm, the evidence becomes increasingly scanty and simultaneously more ambiguous. Especially outside the capital city of Constantinople and holy city of Jerusalem, there is almost no indication of a female diaconate beyond a seal and a few passing references emanating from Byzantine Italy in the liminal seventh and eighth centuries. Did the social, political, and military upheavals of the iconoclastic period have a negative effect on the female diaconate? There is no specific evidence to support such a hypothesis, but the apparent decline of the order at this time, especially in the provinces, probably is not sheer coincidence. Female monasticism, like its male counterpart, played an important role in the resistance to imperial iconoclastic policy;¹⁷⁸ the female diaconate, by this time largely tied to female monasticism, may have suffered as a consequence. Moreover, the active female diaconate may have been just another of the many practices and institutions of late antiquity and the early Byzantine period that fell into oblivion during this critical period as provincial cities contracted and refashioned themselves and their civic and

177. Further evidence of the loss of institutional memory of ordained deaconesses may be the lack of any mention of them in Symeon of Thessaloniki's *De sacris ordinationibus*, in PG 155:361–470; deacons are treated in cols. 361–84, along in part with other major orders. Symeon was born in Constantinople in the latter half of the fourteenth century and became archbishop of Thessaloniki, the second most important city in the Byzantine Empire, in the early fifteenth century. His massive works describe in detail the liturgical practices of Thessaloniki in his time, yet in this treatise on clerical ordinations he never mentions female deacons. See Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 174.

178. For example, popular tradition held that the first iconophile martyr was a nun. For women's roles during iconoclasm, consult Alice-Mary Talbot, ed., *Byzantine Defenders of Images: Eight Saints' Lives in Translation* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1998).

religious way of life.¹⁷⁹ However, given the continuation of male clerical orders virtually unchanged, the discontinuities of the iconoclastic period probably did not in themselves play a major role in the decline of the female diaconate.

By at least the ninth or tenth century, it appears that only nuns were ordained as female deacons. While the evidence for female diaconal ordination itself is less conclusive for the ninth through early twelfth centuries than for earlier eras, there is enough to hypothesize that the female diaconate probably continued to exist as an ordained order in Constantinople and Jerusalem for most if not all of this period. Judging by John Zonaras' implication that the ordained order still existed in his time (early to mid-twelfth century),¹⁸⁰ it may be further hypothesized that the ordination of female deacons in the Byzantine Church ceased at about this time since, according to Theodore Balsamon's statement in the late twelfth century, "[t]oday deaconesses are no longer ordained although certain members of ascetical religious communities are erroneously styled deaconesses."¹⁸¹ At the same time, Balsamon noted that the (no longer ordained) order continued to exist as a special group of nuns, and Anthony of Novgorod described them as participating in the chanting of the matins service.

No one knows exactly when or why the female diaconate disappeared from the life of the Byzantine Church in the late middle Byzantine period since there are no extant sources calling for its abolition (with the exception of Patriarch Athanasius' *entagma*, which however was promulgated after the order ceased to be an ordained one). Most scholars have chosen not to hypothesize on it, although a few theories have been advanced.¹⁸² In the absence of any documentary

179. See, for example, Cyril Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), esp. 60–87. The Eastern provinces in particular were seriously affected by, first, Arab incursions beginning in the seventh century and, later, repeated Turkish onslaughts, particularly in Asia Minor, from the eleventh century on.

180. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 171, n. 36, remarks that both John Zonaras and Alexius Aristenes (mid-twelfth century) "commented on this canon as if it were still in force," yet discounts the value of these witnesses since, he claims, "that was the typical proceeding of that age." Nevertheless, the fact that Balsamon, near the end of the same century, did not attempt to pretend that an extinct order still existed seems to challenge Martimort's denial. Zonaras and Aristenes are probably as reliable about the practice of their day as are Balsamon and, later, Blastares, for theirs. It is also possible that female deacons were no longer being ordained by the mid-twelfth century, but that Zonaras and Aristenes knew of women who had been ordained slightly earlier.

181. See n. 53, above.

182. For example, Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 171–74, recounts the evidence from Balsamon of the disappearance of the female diaconate but suggests no rationale for it. By contrast, FitzGerald, *Women Deacons*, 134–48, suggests several possible reasons, but most do not answer the question of why the female diaconate declined in the Byzantine Church at the end of the middle Byzantine period. For example, changing liturgical practices

evidence pointing to other causes, the most likely answer—both for the decline beginning in the iconoclastic period and the eventual vanishing of the ordained order in the twelfth century—is the introduction into the Byzantine Church beginning in the late seventh century of severe liturgical restrictions on menstruating women.

The extant evidence for the early church shows a dichotomy between Alexandria and Antioch in attitudes toward menstruation and other bodily functions associated by Levitical law with ritual impurity.¹⁸³ The restrictions on menstruants that surfaced first within Christianity in the canonical letters of Dionysius of Alexandria¹⁸⁴ in the mid-third century became canon law for the Byzantine Church in 692 through the Council in Trullo,¹⁸⁵ which adopted wholesale the canonical writings of a dozen bishops, including Dionysius and his later successor, Timothy, who similarly restricted menstruous women from receiving the Eucharist or even entering the church.¹⁸⁶

(including the universality of infant baptism) and reactions to gnosticism might have been relevant in late antiquity and the early Byzantine period, but not in the twelfth century; conversely, the effect of the Church's captivity under Islam might have influenced provincial practices, but would not have been a factor in Constantinople since it was not conquered by the Ottoman Turks until at least three centuries after the disappearance of the deaconess. The presumed negative influence of Islam on women's liturgical orders is also contraindicated by Jerusalem's retention of the female diaconate as well as its unique office of *myrophoroi*. As for the prohibitions of various Western Church councils, those were no more likely to be followed by the Byzantine Church than were Western prohibitions against married clergy. FitzGerald (143–45) does raise the issue of menstruation in the context of the writings of Theodore Balsamon and Matthew Blastares, but draws no specific conclusions; "women's sexuality" is simply one possibility among several.

183. See n. 108, above. It should be noted, however, that even in Syria, where women *per se* were not excluded from the altar, they were at times restricted from both it and the Eucharist when menstruous. See Branham, "Bloody Women and Bloody Spaces," 20. Branham's thesis is that restrictions against menstruous women in Jewish temple worship and Christian eucharistic worship in late antiquity and the early medieval period were based on the notion of eliminating competing bloods, menstrual and sacred (that is, the Eucharist). Her thesis might provide at least a partial explanation for the ease with which canonists such as Balsamon and Blastares rationalized away for ejaculant men the Levitical notions of ritual impurity that they so eagerly applied to menstruating and postpartum women. See Patrick Viscuso, "Purity and Sexual Defilement in Late Byzantine Theology," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 57 (1991): 400–402.
184. Can. 2, in PG 10:1281A; Pitra, *Iuris ecclesiastici*, 1:544; G. A. Rhalles and M. Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων* (Athens: G. Chartophylax, 1854), 4:7–9, including the commentaries of Zonaras and Balsamon. See Branham, "Bloody Women and Bloody Spaces," 19–20; Cohen, "Menstruants and the Sacred," 288–89; Frank, "Menstruation and Motherhood," 198–201.
185. Can. 2, in Pitra, *Iuris ecclesiastici*, 2:21–23.
186. Pitra, *Iuris ecclesiastici*, 1:631. This is Question 7 in a series of 18 questions and answers, referred to as "the 18 canons of Timothy" or the "Canonical Replies." Frank, "Menstruation and Motherhood," 200, notes that, in Question 6 (requiring a woman to defer baptism until after her menstrual cycle) as well as in Question 7, Timothy adds that the menstruant should wait "until she has been purified of it" (ἕως οὗ καθαρσθῇ—but

It probably took some time for the private canons given ecumenical authority by the Council in Trullo to gain such widespread acceptance as to alter liturgical practice and be taken for granted by the twelfth- and fourteenth-century canonists Theodore Balsamon and Matthew Blastares, respectively.¹⁸⁷ It is in this same period—between the eighth and eleventh centuries—that fragmentary evidence indicates the rise of ritual impurity notions associated with childbirth, the other “women-and-blood” nexus. The eighth-century Barberini codex gives only a single prayer for a newborn child’s presentation at church forty days after birth, with no rubrics attached and no mention of the mother.¹⁸⁸ By contrast, in the eleventh-century Grottaferrata manuscript, there is a full forty-day rite commemorating not only the entrance of the child into the church but also the mother’s return to it; the service is named for the mother¹⁸⁹ and includes two prayers for her as well as two prayers for the child. In addition to this liturgical evidence, there is the startling canonical opinion of the early-ninth-century Constantinopolitan patriarch Nikephoros, who advised that an infant who received emergency baptism before the forty-day rite could not be cared for, or even approached, by its mother until the mother had been “purified.”¹⁹⁰

note that Taft, “Women at Church,” 75, reads ἕως ἂν καθαρῶσθῃ, although this does not substantively change the meaning of the text). Taft wonders whether “there was a specific Christian ritual of purification for women, or only that there was a period of time that had to elapse in order to effect purification?” Since the church would not have required the sacrifice of pigeons as prescribed in the Levitical law, it is not unreasonable to assume that the purification was a bath of some sort, similar to that which the fifth-century *Testamentum Domini* (I, 42) required of Widows following their menstrual period before they returned to the altar. I. Rahmani, *Testamentum Domini*, 100; Eng. trans. Grant S. Sperry-White, “Daily Prayer in Its Ascetic Context in the Syriac and Ethiopic *Testamentum Domini*” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1993), 59. However, this does not mean that such bathing was a church ritual. The term could just as easily refer either to some homespun ritual or even to a woman’s visiting the public baths at the end of her menstrual cycle, in which case καθαρῶσθῃ might more accurately be translated simply as “made clean” than “purified,” which has ritual connotations. Regarding this provision in the *Testamentum Domini*, also see Taft, “Women at Church,” 75.

187. See Branham, “Bloody Women and Bloody Spaces,” 20–21. Moreover, given Balsamon’s complaint, in PG 138:465C, that women often ignored the full proscription by participating in the liturgy from the narthex, one wonders just how widespread—or at least heartfelt—the acceptance of restrictions on menstruants was even in the twelfth century. See Taft, “Women at Church,” 50.

188. Bar. 336, 113, in *Barberini*, 97. See Miguel Arranz, “Les sacrements de l’ancien Euchologe constantinopolitain (3),” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 49 (1983): 292–93.

189. “Εὐχαὶ εἰς γυναῖκα λεχὼ, μετὰ μ’ ἡμέρας.” Goar, *Euchologion*, 267–71.

190. Pitra, *luris ecclesiastici*, 2:335. José Grosdidier de Matons, “La femme dans l’empire byzantin,” in *Histoire mondiale de la femme*, ed. Pierre Grimal (Paris: Nouvelle librairie de France, 1967), 36, appears to be aware of this canon of Nikephoros when he comments on the differing effects of the mother’s ritual uncleanness on the newborn,

Thus, by the eleventh century, if not earlier, the Byzantine Church had developed a theology of women's ritual impurity associated with menstruation and childbirth, and even expressed this liturgically through the expansion of the forty-day blessing service previously offered exclusively for the newborn child. So, it is not surprising that Balsamon erroneously argued, against the evidence to the contrary (of which he was aware), that women deacons in earlier times could not have attended at the altar because "the impurity of their menstrual periods dictated their separation from the divine and holy sanctuary,"¹⁹¹ his assumption of unchanging ecclesiastical tradition leading him to extrapolate anachronistically back to earlier church history the theology and practice of the late-twelfth-century Byzantine Church.

However, a fourteenth-century Byzantine canonist, Matthew Blastares, did not go so far as to argue that women had never been permitted per se into the altar area. Indeed, Blastares was obviously familiar with much of the late antique and early to middle Byzantine literature regarding the female diaconate, including the ordination rite.¹⁹² The canonist even stated that some people believed that female deacons "were permitted to approach the altar [θυσιαστήριον] and to share a role with male deacons pretty much on an equal basis with them."¹⁹³ While admitting that little was now known of the ministry of women deacons, Blastares nevertheless found the latter proposition improbable, arguing that women could not have served liturgically at the altar since they were not permitted to teach publicly; rather, they were appointed as deacons in order to assist at baptism. As for women at the altar, Blastares observed that women in earlier times had been permitted to approach the altar, giving as an example Gorgonia, the sister of Gregory of Nazianzus.¹⁹⁴ Therefore, Matthew Blastares stands out as the rare Byzantine who not only acknowledged that ordained female deacons had at one time existed but who, at least through the opinion of "others," recognized that they may have disappeared because of a change in the church's theology and practice: "Later, however, the Fathers forbade them to approach the altar and carry out any service [ὑπηρέσις] there because of their menstrual periods."¹⁹⁵

depending on the infant's baptismal status. This would explain why infants normally were not baptized before forty days.

191. Theodore Balsamon, *Responsa* 35, in PG 138:988; Eng. trans. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 172.

192. Blastares, *Collectio alphabetica*, letter Γ, chap. 11, in PG 144:1176, summarizes the ordination rite as it appears in the Barberini and Grottaferrata *euchologia*.

193. *Ibid.*, col. 1173; Eng. trans. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 173.

194. *Ibid.*

195. *Ibid.*; Eng. trans. Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 173.

VI. CONCLUSION

As for the modern scholarly debate over whether the female deacon was considered “ordained” and whether that ordination was considered a major order, the naysayers predicate their opposition on two erroneous postulates. The first is the unsubstantiated presupposition—in truth, a tautological argument—that women were always excluded from major orders in the history of the church, and that to admit that they had been ordained to one major order then would open the door for their admission to the other two.¹⁹⁶ The second is the assumption that, if the female diaconate was not identical to the male diaconate in liturgical function, then it was not a true diaconal office.¹⁹⁷

However, both presuppositions fail on their merits. With respect to the first one, in reality all three major orders are distinct and unique, but the diaconate is particularly distinct vis-à-vis both the presbytery and the episcopacy. As noted earlier in this article, even male deacons were not permitted to celebrate any of the sacraments, including baptism. Their liturgical function was to assist the presbyter or bishop, and the deacon was even buried as a layperson, there being no special funeral rite for him as there was for presbyters and bishops.¹⁹⁸ That women were ordained to the diaconate in the Byzantine Church does not thereby lead to the conclusion that they could (at least in theory) also have been ordained to the presbytery and episcopacy. There is no evidence to support such a conclusion, and modern concerns about whether or not women should be ordained to these orders should not influence current scholarly interpretations of the historical record.¹⁹⁹

As for the second presupposition, limiting the choices for understanding the female diaconate in the Byzantine Church to “equal to the male diaconate” or “not a true diaconate” creates a false and overly simplistic dichotomy.²⁰⁰ The female diaconate obviously was not the exact equivalent to the male diaconate since the deaconess did not serve the public liturgical role that the male deacon did—she

196. For example, Pheidias, “The Question of the Priesthood of Women,” 181–89.

197. This second argument, below the surface, appears to be based on the first one; that is, it has more to do with modern ecclesiastical debates over the role of women in the church than with a dispassionate scholarly view of the historical record. See Martimort, *Deaconesses*, 148–56, 243–50.

198. See n. 84, above.

199. L’Huillier, *Church of the Ancient Councils*, 316, n. 392, echoes this sentiment.

200. L’Huillier, *Church of the Ancient Councils*, 245, raises a similar caution in his discussion of the significance of canon 15 of Chalcedon with respect to the status of the female diaconate.

neither chanted the diaconal petitions, nor processed at the Great Entrance (an assumption based on her not receiving the *ripidion* during her ordination), nor distributed the Eucharist to the laity during the liturgy. This should not be surprising given the Byzantines' ideology of the private role of women versus the public role of men.²⁰¹ This same distinction was clear in the respective functions of male and female deacons in the early church. In other words, the female deacon's liturgical ministry mirrored the public space/private space segregation of roles and functions endemic in both late antique and Byzantine cultures.

However, although the female diaconate in the Byzantine Church was not simply the mirror image of the male diaconate, it was considered equivalent to the male diaconate in terms of clerical ranking. Certainly, that is how the Byzantines treated it, as evidenced from the sixth through the twelfth centuries in imperial legislation, church orders, ordination rites, and even the order in which the ordination rites were organized in the *euchologia*. The ordination rite itself, including vesting with the diaconal *orarion* and reception of Communion at the altar with the deacons, presbyters, and bishop, further underscores the Byzantines' assumption that the deaconess was part of the higher clergy of the church. It was related to the male diaconate in a manner analogous, perhaps, to the relationship between the orders of the episcopacy and the presbytery.²⁰² Just as the bishop's role more actively involved him in the larger church than did the presbyter's, so the male deacon's role more actively involved him, particularly liturgically, in the larger parish community than did the deaconess'. Thus, the Byzantine female diaconate was a liminal and unique clerical office that operated as a distinct order, at the diaconal level, focused on pastoral and liturgical ministry to women and recognized as a major clerical order in both the civil and ecclesiastical literature of the Byzantine period.

201. Ideology and actual practice often differed, of course. See Judith Herrin, "In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach," 167–89, in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, eds. Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1983; rev. ed. 1993), esp. 168–70; Alice-Mary Talbot, "Women," 117–43, in *The Byzantines*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo, trans. Thomas Dunlap, Teresa Lavender Fagan, and Charles Lambert (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), esp. 129–40.

202. See n. 81, above.